

BREAKING THE “ARMORED CEILING”: WOMEN IN COMBAT POSITIONS AND  
THE ONTOLOGY OF GENDER

by

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## ABSTRACT

Historically, women have legally been excluded from participating in direct combat, but in December 2015 the Department of Defense made the groundbreaking decision to open all combat-related positions across the military to women. In this thesis I aim to show that from a feminist and egalitarian point of view this decision was the right decision.

In this thesis I plan on proceeding in the following way: in Chapter 2, I am going to review the history of women in the Armed Forces, and I will explain how the Armed Forces have legally justified the decision to keep women out of direct combat. In Chapter 3, I will set forth what I call the “traditionalist’s view” on what it means to be a combat soldier, as a way of framing, and thus understanding, the opposition to women in combat roles. Next, to put this into perspective, I am going to argue that the ontological category of ‘woman’ should be understood in the context of social construction and power. Against this backdrop the traditionalist’s assumptions about sex and gender become particularly problematic.

In Chapter 4, I will present two arguments for why women should be allowed to serve in combat positions. First, the exclusion of women from combat is based on social fictions about what it means to be a ‘woman’, and to move forward these works of social fiction have to be dispelled. Second, since women are already serving on the frontlines in today’s modern, asymmetrical warfare, it makes no sense to uphold the combat exclusion

policies. Finally, in Chapter 5, I am going to carefully consider three major objections to women in combat positions: women are naturally physically weak, women disrupt male bonding and unit cohesion in the military, and women are sexual distractions who put the mission at risk. Chapter 6 concludes that the new policy announced by the Department of Defense is the *right* policy for an integrated military that is both progressive and effective.

For my fellow sisters in arms

Women and fiction remain, so far as I am concerned, unsolved problems.

Virginia Wolf, *A Room of One's Own*

Feminism isn't about making women stronger. Women are already strong. It's about changing the way the world perceives that strength.

G. D. Anderson, poet

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

On December 3rd, 2015 Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter made the historic announcement that all military occupations and positions will open up to women, without exception.<sup>1</sup> He explained that,

They'll [women] be allowed to drive tanks, fire mortars and lead infantry soldiers into combat. They'll be able to serve as Army Rangers and Green Berets, Navy SEALs, Marine Corps infantry, Air Force parajumpers and everything else that was previously open only to men.<sup>2</sup>

Women currently (January 2016) make up 15.3% of all active duty personnel across the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force.<sup>3</sup> The decision to overturn previous restrictions on women in combat will open up 220,000 combat-related jobs to women across the services, and the announcement is a giant leap away from the restrictions that historically have kept women from legally participating in direct combat. The expectation is that the change to policy will be implemented at the beginning of 2016.

When I first started my research on women in combat in the summer of 2015 the old policies were still in place. Those policies stated that women were not allowed to serve in direct combat, yet the War on Terror had put deployed female soldiers directly in harm's way for years. For example, as truck drivers on roads riddled with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), women found themselves in danger of being blown to pieces,

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Rosenberg and Dave Phillips, "All Combat Roles Now Open to Women," *New*

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Kristy N. Kamarck, "Women in Combat: Issues for Congress," *Congressional Research Service* (2015): 13, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R42075.pdf>

yet they were told that their role was one of *support*, and not one that would require direct engagement with the enemy. In the initial stage of my research I intended to argue for why women should be allowed to serve in various combat positions, such as in infantry, armor, artillery, and Special Forces, as long as the individual female soldier would be qualified for the particular job. Secretary Carter's announcement that women will soon be able to hold combat related jobs did not change what I intended to argue, but reinforced the importance and urgency of the issue.

As the title of my project suggests, there is an "armored ceiling" for women serving in the military. That ceiling has kept women from access to equal opportunities, promotion possibilities, and from being recognized for serving on the front lines. It is time for women in the military to be acknowledged fully for their service and for women in the military to have access to the same opportunities as their male counterparts. In this thesis I aim to show why Secretary Carter's decision to open all combat-related jobs to women was the right decision.

Some might wonder why I, as a feminist writer, want to promote women's participation in combat.<sup>4</sup> Antimilitary feminist have argued that sending women overseas to serve in combat means accepting the values set forth by the patriarchy, and that it amounts to accepting a violent agenda that only serves men's longstanding interests. While I am sympathetic to these ideas, I accept that the United States must have a strong

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<sup>4</sup> One might then wonder if I am writing from a point of view of nonideal theory, and the answer would be yes. This answer is motivated by two facts about the world: the persistence of inequality between the sexes and the continued occurrence of war. Instead of thinking we can start from an ideal standard for what society should be like and hope that people will realize what their perfect duties are with regards to justice, I think we have to pay more attention to the existing power structure (and its injustices) and take a grassroots approach to bringing about social change in gradual steps.

military for it to maintain its status as one of the world's military and political leaders. However, this thesis is not about whether or not the United States is justified in its military actions around the world, but about the importance of letting women serve in combat if they are able and willing.<sup>5</sup> In certain ways my position might seem counterintuitive to some outsiders, as well as to other feminists, since I advocate for women's right to serve in direct combat, which amounts to being willing to kill for a living. However, it is only counterintuitive if we accept certain dichotomies about the sexes, such as women as nurturers and men as aggressors, and part of the motivation for this project is to dispel such notions. Some women are well capable, physically and mentally, to serve in combat positions, and from an egalitarian point of view these women should be allowed to do so *if* they meet the standards set for the particular jobs. My focus is on the issue of women's full inclusion in the Armed Forces and their right to serve their country in a manner of their own choosing, as long as they are able and qualified.

For this thesis I plan on proceeding in the following way: in Chapter 2, I am going to review the history of women in the Armed Forces, and I will explain how the Armed Forces have legally justified the decision to keep women out of direct combat. It seems that despite a policy of meritocracy, the Armed Forces have not been as progressive towards equality as otherwise assumed.

In Chapter 3, I will set forth what I call "the traditionalist's view" on what it means to be a combat soldier as a way of framing, and thus understanding, the opposition

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<sup>5</sup> Inevitably, this brings up the issue of women registering for Selective Service. As with the issue of the justification of the United States' use of military power, I think the issue of women and Selective Service deserves separate attention, and I will set it aside as a possible future research project.

to women in combat roles. It is as a direct result of the traditionalist's view that the ontological category of 'combat soldier' is perceived as a purely masculine image. Next, to put this into perspective, I am going to argue that the ontological category of 'woman' should be understood in the context of social construction and power. Against this backdrop the traditionalist's assumptions about sex and gender become particular problematic.

In Chapter 4, I will present two arguments for why women should be allowed to serve in combat positions. First, the exclusion of women from combat is based on myths about what it means to be a 'woman,' and these works of social fiction have to be dispelled. Second, since women are already serving on the frontlines in today's modern, asymmetrical warfare, it makes no sense to uphold the combat exclusion policies. Finally, in Chapter 5, I am going to carefully consider three major objections to women in combat positions: women are naturally physically weak, women disrupt male bonding and unit cohesion in the military, and women are sexual distractions who put the mission at risk. Ultimately, I am going to conclude that the new policy announced by Secretary Carter is the *right* policy for an integrated military that is both progressive and effective. The days of the good old boys club are over; women are willing and capable to serve on the front lines, and it is about time that we let them.

## 2 WOMEN, THE MILITARY, AND COMBAT EXCLUSION

### 2.1 History of Women in the Armed Forces

Since the Revolutionary War women have served in various positions in the U.S. military. Margaret Cochran Corbin was the first woman to ever receive a military pension back in 1776 after she was injured in the fight against the British over Fort Washington.<sup>6</sup> However, Corbin was an exception, as women throughout the history of the armed forces have served mainly in jobs in which they were assigned to clerical duties or supported medical services.<sup>7</sup> The Army Nurse Corps was established in 1901, followed by the Navy Nurse Corps in 1908,<sup>8</sup> but throughout the early part of the twentieth century the idea of including women in military roles and operations was unpopular.

Due to the need for an expanded work force during World War II, Congress found it necessary to open more jobs to women, and by 1942 the Naval Reserve for women and the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps were established. The Marine Corps Women's Reserve and the Women's Army Corps followed these units in 1943.<sup>9</sup> Congress explained that the purpose of the Woman's Army Auxiliary Corps was "for noncombatant service with the Army of the United States for the purpose of making available to the national defense when needed the knowledge, skill, and special training

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<sup>6</sup> Kamarck, "Women in Combat: Issues for Congress," 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., appendix.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 3.

of the woman of this Nation.”<sup>10</sup> Although the women who served in World War II mostly operated phones, did clerical work, or assisted medical personnel, several women performed bravely beyond their assigned noncombatant duties. For example, four nurses, who evacuated 42 patients under a bombardment by the Germans at a field hospital at Anzio beach during the Italian campaign, were awarded Silver Star medals for valor.<sup>11</sup> The Silver Star is the nation’s third-highest military decoration for valor, and it is awarded for gallantry in action when facing an enemy.

At first, women’s inclusion in the military was temporary. It was an attempt to aid the overall war effort, and it was not until the enactment of the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act in 1948 that women were made a permanent part of the Armed Forces. However, the permanence of women in the military did not established women on par with men, as a 2% cap restricted the number of women in the enlisted ranks, and a 10% cap restricted the ranks of woman officers.<sup>12</sup> The Women’s Armed Services Integration Act made it clear that female soldiers were subject to a combat exclusion policy, which meant their role would be support in various forms such as supply, logistics, or medical services.

The caps on women were lifted in 1967 for two good reasons. First, the draft had ended after much tumult and debate over the unpopular war in Vietnam, and the end of

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<sup>10</sup> David F. Burrelli, “Women in Combat: Issues for Congress,” *Congressional Research Service* (2013): 1, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/202472.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Jimmie O. Keenan, “The DoD Combat Exclusion Policy: Time for a Change?” in “Women in Combat Compendium,” ed. Michele M. Putko and Douglas V. Johnson II, *Strategic Studies Institute* (2008): 21.

<http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub830.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

the draft was the start of the new All-Volunteer Force in 1973.<sup>13</sup> Now it was no longer mandatory for men to serve their country, but instead the government hoped that both able-bodied young men *and* women would volunteer to serve by their own free will. It was a necessary move since the aftermath of the Vietnam War had made military recruiting difficult, and not enough men were willing to enlist. Second, the movement for equal rights, which at its height swept the nation in the 1960s, was partially the reason for the dissolution of the cap on women enlistees.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the 1970s legislation was slowly broadened to include women across the services. By 1975 a landmark decision allowed women to be admitted to the service academies beginning in the summer of 1976.<sup>15</sup> It has been well documented that the first women who were accepted to academies such as West Point and the Air Force Academy were met with scrutiny and hostility from the men.

However, with time women have managed to carve a foothold, not just in the service academies, but also throughout the military, and many women have served honorably in recent conflicts such as the Gulf War (1990-91), the War in Afghanistan (2001-2014), and the Iraq War (2003-2011). Nevertheless, it has been a well-known fact that women have been barred from combat roles, so how exactly do women participate in wars if they are not allowed to fight on the front lines? I shall look at that question and the military's combat policies regarding women in the next section.

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<sup>13</sup> Kamarck, "Women in Combat: Issues for Congress," 3.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 4.

## 2.2 Combat Policies Regarding Women

Policies regarding women in combat have changed a lot over the years. Prior to the time of the Gulf War no statute restricted the Army from assigning women to combat military occupation specialties (MOSs), but the Secretary of the Army, under title 10 U.S. Code § 3012, was authorized to change and develop policies. He did this with the intent to keep women from “routine engagement in direct combat.”<sup>16</sup> At the time of the Gulf War “direct combat” was given the following definition:

Engaging an enemy with individual or crew-served weapons while being exposed to direct enemy fire, a high probability of direct physical contact with the enemy’s personnel, and a substantial risk of capture. Direct combat takes place while closing with the enemy by fire, maneuver, or shock effect in order to destroy or capture, or while repelling assault by fire, close combat or counterattack.<sup>17</sup>

In February 1988 the Department of Defense (DoD) implemented the “Risk Rule” for assignment of women. Prior to the Risk Rule it had proven difficult to consistently assign women because it was unclear which tasks they were allowed to perform. The main component of the Risk Rule made it explicit that it “excluded women from noncombat units or missions if the risks of exposure to direct combat, hostile fire, or capture were equal to or greater than the risk in the combat unit they supported.”<sup>18</sup> What this meant was that if a woman was assigned to a noncombat unit, such as an engineering unit or a medical support unit, and that unit was to be deployed to a theatre with a risk of exposure to direct combat, then the risk to the support unit would have to be less than the risk to the combat unit. If not, then the women in that unit could not be assigned to the

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<sup>16</sup> Rosemarie Skaine, *Women at War: Gender Issues of Americans in Combat* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1999), 231.

<sup>17</sup> Army Regulation (AR) 600-13 (Army Policy for the Assignment of Female Soldiers), 27 March 1992.

<sup>18</sup> Keenan, “The DoD Combat Exclusion Policy: Time for a Change?” 22.



support mission.

During the Gulf War the Risk Rule soon proved to be extremely impractical. It was not possible to realistically calculate the risks that women would face during their deployments, as the 16 women killed in action (KIA) and the two women prisoners of war (POW) clearly proved.<sup>19</sup> After the Gulf War was over the American public had acquired a new awareness of women in the military from the many televised images from the war. Many were appalled by the fact that women were dying overseas, whereas others, such as legislators and women's rights groups, demanded to know what was being done about legally changing the policies regarding women's full inclusion in the military.

The Gulf War taught the DoD a valuable lesson: no one, man or woman, was safe in an active theatre. As a result of this realization, in January 1994, three years after the Gulf War had ended, then Secretary of Defense Les Aspin rescinded the Risk Rule and implemented a new "Direct Ground Combat and Assignment Rule." The rule stated:

A. Rule. Service Members are eligible to be assigned to all positions for which they are qualified, except that women shall be excluded from assignment to units below the brigade<sup>20</sup> level whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground, as defined below.

B. Definition. Direct ground combat is engaging an enemy on the ground with individual or crew served weapons, while being exposed to hostile fire and to a high probability of direct physical contact with the hostile force's personnel. Direct ground combat takes place well forward on the battlefield while locating and closing with the enemy to defeat them by fire, maneuver, or shock effect.<sup>21</sup>

By the time the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq rolled around in the early 2000s the Direct

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<sup>19</sup> Kamarck, "Women in Combat: Issues for Congress," 5.

<sup>20</sup> Military structure roughly follows this order: squad (4-10 soldiers), platoon (3-4 squads), company (3-4 platoons), battalion (3-5 companies), brigade (3+ battalions), division (3 brigades), and corps (2-5 divisions). So by the new rule women could be assigned to combat units brigade level and up, but not down.

<sup>21</sup> Department of Defense, *Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule*, January 13, 1994, <http://www.govexec.com/pdfs/031910d1.pdf>

Ground Combat and Assignment Rule was the rule with which the military had to comply when assigning women. However, the wars in the Middle East were unlike any wars that the United States had fought before, and the assessment that “combat takes place well forward on the battlefield” did not seem accurate. These wars were asymmetrical, with no easily identifiable frontlines in urban environments and rugged mountain terrains. Often the risks of assisting convoys, such as by medical or mechanical support, were far more dangerous than kicking in doors or working behind powerful pieces of artillery.

Despite the Direct Ground Combat and Assignment Rule, women often found themselves at risk in the landscape of asymmetrical warfare. In 2007 the RAND corporation prepared a report noting significant inconsistencies regarding compliance with assigned policies.<sup>22</sup> The main problem was that the DoD’s Direct Ground Combat and Assignment Rule contradicted the Army’s own policy, Army Regulation (AR) 600-13, Army Policy for the Assignment of Female Soldiers.<sup>23</sup> The Service Women’s Action Network provided a clear explanation for the contradiction:

While the Army prohibits women from being assigned to positions or units that *routinely* collocate<sup>24</sup> with units assigned a direct combat mission, the DoD policy states that women may be restricted “where units and positions are *doctrinally* required to physically collocate and remain with direct ground combat units that are closed to women.”<sup>25</sup>

The discrepancy between policies made it clear that commanders had found loopholes to use women in forward operating positions. Evidence for this was reported in

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<sup>22</sup> Kamarck, “Women in Combat: Issues for Congress,” 9.

<sup>23</sup> Service Women’s Action Network, *Women in Combat: The Facts*, February 2011, 2, <http://servicewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/97-WIC-fact-sheet.pdf> (accessed January 2, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> In AR 600-13 it was made explicitly clear that collocation occurs when a designated unit physically locates and remains with another unit whose mission is to routinely engage in direct combat.

<sup>25</sup> Service Women’s Action Network, *Women in Combat: The Facts*, 2.

the RAND report, which disclosed that the Army had recognized the combat service of several hundred Army women and awarded them the Combat Action Badge.<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, female soldiers had been working in so-called “Lioness Teams,” which consisted of all female “searchers,” who had been used in interactions with local Afghani or Iraqi women to accommodate cultural differences. The Lioness Teams often put themselves in places and situations where they were at risk for attack by the enemy. Evidently, the military had not been complying with the policies regarding the assignment of women (I will revisit this claim in Section 4.2).

With the lessons learned in Afghanistan and Iraq the DoD realized it would need to revise the Direct Ground Combat and Assignment Rule and tailor it to fit modern, asymmetrical warfare. In January 2013, then Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced that he was rescinding the Direct Ground Combat and Assignment Rule, and part of the announcement stated:

The Department of Defense is determined to successfully integrate women into the remaining restricted occupational fields within our military, while adhering to the following [5] guiding principles developed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

[1] Ensuring the success of our nation’s warfighting forces by preserving unit readiness, cohesion, and morale.

[2] Ensuring all service men and women are given the opportunity to succeed and are set up for success with viable career paths.

[3] Retaining the trust and confidence of the American people to defend this nation by promoting policies that maintain the best quality and most qualified people.

[4] Validating occupational performance standards, both physical and mental, for all military occupation specialties (MOS), specifically those that remain closed to

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<sup>26</sup> The Combat Action Badge may be awarded to personnel not assigned to infantry (combat) units, and it is awarded to personnel who have been under hostile fire or under imminent threat.

women. Eligibility for training and development with designated occupational fields should consist of qualitative and quantifiable standards reflecting the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for each occupation. For occupation specialties open to women, the occupational performance standards must be gender-neutral as required by P.L. 103-160, Section 542<sup>27</sup> (sic) (1993).

[5] Ensuring that a sufficient cadre of midgrade/senior women enlisted and officers are assigned to commands at the point of introduction to ensure success in the long run. This may require an adjustment to recruiting efforts, assignment processes, and personnel policies. Assimilation of women into heretofore “closed units” will be informed by continual in-stride assessments and pilot efforts.<sup>28</sup>

Secretary Panetta’s decision to rescind the Direct Ground Combat and Assignment Rule opened up two categories of positions to women: closed combat arms occupational specialties and noncombat specialties assigned to combat units.<sup>29</sup> Had it not been for former Secretary Panetta’s initiative to rescind the Direct Ground Combat and Assignment Rule, it is unlikely that current Secretary of Defense Carter would have been able to make the historic decision to let women serve in all combat-related positions.

### 2.3 Do Women Have Equality in the Military?

The history of women in the Armed Forces offers conflicting evidence for what women have been assigned to do and what many women have *actually* been doing. This in turn creates a questionable double standard, as women have not been recognized for doing their jobs while men, for the most part, have been acknowledged for their efforts.

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<sup>27</sup> Regarding P.L. 103-160, Section 543 explicitly states that for MOSs open to both men and women gender-neutral occupational performance standards must be enforced. The standards should be based on skills necessary and relevant for performing that particular MOS. Furthermore, the law states that the physical requirements for muscular strength, endurance, and cardiovascular capacity for a particular MOS should be applied on a gender-neutral basis.

<sup>28</sup> Department of Defense, News Release No. 037-13, January 24, 2013.

<http://archive.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=15784>

<sup>29</sup> Kamarck, “Women in Combat: Issues for Congress,” 13.

Figures from 2013 showed that women were excluded from 7.3% of combat-related Army positions, such as infantry, armor, and Special Forces. This has had debilitating effects on many women's career paths, as one of the most valued conditions for promotions in the Armed Forces is combat experience.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the combat restrictions have hindered women from participating fully in the overall mission of the military.

Women have been allowed to serve in the Armed Forces, but they have not been allowed to serve on equal footing with men. In some ways this is surprising, as the military has long been thought of as a role model for egalitarian institutions. For example, it is true that men of different racial and ethnic backgrounds in the military are more integrated than in a lot of other workplaces due to President Harry Truman's Executive Order 9981 (1948), which called for the racial integration of the military. It is also true that men and women are offered the same basic pay and health benefits in the military. However, since women have not had equal opportunities to serve in all occupations, it would be unfair to extend the notion of equality to every aspect of the Armed Forces. For example, soldiers serving in combat zones receive "Hostile Fire and Imminent Danger Pay," which amounts to an additional \$225 per month that the service member is deployed in a designated dangerous area.<sup>31</sup> So while women receive the same basic pay and health benefits as men, they ultimately lose out on making the same money as men.

Women *have* been treated differently because of their sex/gender, and as a result

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<sup>30</sup> Megan H. MacKenzie, "Let Women Fight: Ending the U.S. Military's Female Combat Ban," *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, January 23, 2013, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2012-11-01/let-women-fight>

<sup>31</sup> Department of Defense, *Military Compensation: Hostile Fire/Imminent Danger Pay*, 2015, [http://militarypay.defense.gov/Pay/SpecialandIncentivePays/HFP\\_IDP.aspx](http://militarypay.defense.gov/Pay/SpecialandIncentivePays/HFP_IDP.aspx)

thereof, they have missed opportunities for not only freely choosing their field within the Armed Forces, but they have also missed opportunities for promotions and leadership positions as a direct result of being excluded from combat. To some female soldiers the hardest blow has been missing out on the prestige that comes from serving in a combat-related position. Some women did not join the military to push paperwork around, but to fight, and those women feel that they are spending their careers in the Armed Forces on a level secondary to that of men.

Despite priding itself on meritocracy, the military does not appear to have been as progressive as it would like to believe when it comes to gender equality. The Service Women's Action Network agrees with the conclusion of the RAND report that the conflicts between Army policies and DoD directives are confusing, contradicting, and ambiguous.<sup>32</sup> From an equal opportunity perspective this seems highly unfair, even more so given that no real justification is provided. Paternalism offers the "best" justification since the attempt to keep women out of combat has partly been an attempt to keep women safe. The assumption that women must be protected has to do with how society perceives ontological categories of gender, and in the next section I shall examine this assumption in more detail.

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<sup>32</sup> Service Women's Action Network, *Women in Combat- The Facts*, 5.

### 3 ONTOLOGY OF GENDER

Despite Secretary Carter's recent announcement that women will be allowed to serve in combat, it will be an uphill battle to not only finalize the changes to the policy and work out the practical aspects of the integration of women, but also to overcome the opposition, from both people in the public as well as in the military, who feel that women have no place in combat. Next, I will argue that the conflict stems from irreconcilable differences between how traditionalists perceive the ontology of gender and how theories of social construction explain gender.

#### 3.1 The Traditionalist's View

A recent poll (2013) asked 1,005 people whether or not they thought women should be allowed "to serve in ground combat units that engage in close combat." The results revealed that 66% of people surveyed supported women in combat, 26% were opposed, and 8% did not know.<sup>33</sup> There was no significant divide between men and women, as 65% of men and 66% of women were in favor of letting women serve in combat-related positions. Additionally, of people polled with veterans in the household, the survey reported that 63% were for, 29% were against, and 8% did not know. People polled *without* veterans in the household were 67% for, 24% against, and 9% did not

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<sup>33</sup> Pew Research Center, *Broad Support for Combat Roles for Women*, January 29, 2013, <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/1-29-13%20Women%20in%20Combat%20Release.pdf> (accessed December 29, 2015).

know.<sup>34</sup> What I am interested in here is the overall 26%, who were opposed to women serving in combat, as well as the opposition from 29% of people from a household with a veteran. Despite the overall willingness of the public to let women serve in combat positions, resistance remains amongst a smaller group of people. Some of this resistance has roots in the military community, and it comes from people who believe in and live by “traditional” values. Consequently, for the remainder of this thesis I shall refer to this stance as the “traditionalist’s view.”

No view exemplifies the traditionalist’s view better than that of Brian Mitchell. Mitchell is a writer and blogger who served as an infantry and counterintelligence officer in the Army, and he has written two books about the negative effects of women in the military. Mitchell’s books, *Weak Link: The Feminization of the American Military* and *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster*, are not only about why women should not serve in combat, but about why women should not be in the military at all. For the purpose of my project, I will only be concerned with the former claim, because if I can prove that women have a place in combat, it follows that they belong in the military.

Philosophers might wonder why they should take Mitchell seriously as his view on women and gender is on the radical side. Since Mitchell publically has been a very vocal opponent of women in combat,<sup>35</sup> I think his traditionalist view can tell us a lot about the roadblocks women face ahead. Some philosophers might claim that we should

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> On May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1992 Mitchell testified before the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces. During a lengthy speech Mitchell claimed that there is no place for women in the military, unless they are military doctors or nurses. He went so far as to say that women in the military jeopardize national security. For the full transcript of Mitchell’s testimony see Mitchell’s book *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster* (appendix).



not take someone who holds such antiquated views about women seriously, but it is not self-evident to Mitchell and many other traditionalists, particularly in the military and far-right communities, exactly why this view on women in combat is outdated. They do not see that the view is negative, from both an egalitarian and a feminist perspective, and despite this, their beliefs have been deeply entrenched in certain areas of American society. For this reason I find it necessary to examine Mitchell's position and urge that we take it seriously. Understanding Mitchell means understanding the barriers that must be overcome for women to serve in combat.

Mitchell argues that he has "mountains of evidence" for the claim that the presence of women in the military is damaging to the Armed Forces.<sup>36</sup> Some of his examples are the problem of depending on soldier-mothers with young children (particularly with single parents and dual-service marriages), the trials of the Citadel and the Virginia Military Institute (VMI),<sup>37</sup> the dangerous effects of sex-based integration (such as fraternization and sexual harassment), the inability of women to meet the same physical standards as men, and the assessment that women are a financial burden to the military for reasons such as high attrition rates and a greater need for medical care.<sup>38</sup> Overall, Mitchell is concerned with the "political correctness" that has swept the military over the last 40-50 years. He goes so far as to assert that, " (...) with the exception of the medical profession there is no real need for women in the military. Every other soldier,

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<sup>36</sup> Brian Mitchell, *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1998), xv.

<sup>37</sup> Mitchell is referring to women's acceptance into the Citadel (the Military College of South Carolina) and the VMI. In 1996 the Supreme Court ruled that the institutions must either admit women to the previously all-male academies or lose public funding. Both institutions complied with the ruling of the Supreme Court.

<sup>38</sup> Brian Mitchell, *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster*, xv-xvi.

sailor, and airman is a potential combatant (...) women are not up to that job.”<sup>39</sup>

According to Mitchell women are simply not made of stuff that makes them eligible to participate in combat.

### 3.2 The Traditionalist's Perceived Ontology of 'Combat Soldier'

I will return to Mitchell's "mountains of evidence" in Section 5 when I address specific objections to women in combat positions, but for now I want to paint a picture of what the traditionalist's kind of 'combat soldier' looks like, or more specifically, I want to examine the perceived ontology of 'combat soldier' seen through the eyes of the traditionalist.

On Mitchell's view the ontology of 'combat soldier' is constituted by the biological form of being male, as well as traditional attributes of masculinity such as courage, aggression, and honor. Mitchell's combat soldier is the definition of virility and strength; he is a selfless servant to his country, willing to put his life on the line for the patriotic cause. We know the image of the combat soldier from Hollywood Blockbusters in which he is portrayed as a brave hero. We see him amidst a chaotic battlefield of blood, screams, smoke, and gunfire, with a cigarette hanging from his lips, dirt on his face, and pain in his eyes, but despite it all, he manages to exude confidence and bravery. He is the epitome of physical *and* mental strength. The combat soldier is poised and self-assured, glamourized despite his grittiness, and according to the traditionalist's view he *is* masculinity. What it means to be a combat soldier is to personify the highest ideals of

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., xvi.

masculinity and other men's courage, bravery, and honor is measured in relation to this highest ideal. The characteristics I have outlined are essential to the kind of entity that Mitchell believes is a "combat soldier."

Mitchell charges that the integration of women in the military has made men think twice about joining, since

(...) The importance of the military's *masculine* character in attracting men [has been disregarded]. In all societies it is *necessary* for young males to do things that establish their identity as men ... Military service has always been considered the most manly of roles (...).<sup>40</sup> [Emphasis added.]

Mitchell further refers to these considerations as "constant truths." He suggests that the relatively successful destruction of sex roles by the American feminist movement should have made the military react by "... offering military service as a refuge for men who still wanted to be *traditional* men."<sup>41</sup> [Emphasis added.]

It is clear from Mitchell's assessment that, for him, the respective roles of the sexes are set in stone. He claims that it is *necessary* for men to establish identities *as* men, and he furthermore accepts this as the truth. From this we can infer that Mitchell must believe there are *necessary* identities for women as well. He writes, "Men do not aspire to be women or to emulate women, and whatever women are, men will seek to be anything other."<sup>42</sup> He sees a fundamental divide between what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman, and clearly, whatever it is that women are, it is something far removed from the manly world of Mitchell's traditional military. On this view, the combat soldier man is the best possible example of what it means to be a man, as the

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<sup>40</sup> Brian Mitchell, *Weak Link: The Feminization of the American Military* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1989), 217.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

ontological category in which he exists is an ideal of masculinity. The properties that are essential for constituting this prime example of a man are properties that have nothing to do with the constitution of 'woman.' Thus, Mitchell's argument against women in combat positions rests on an assumption that gender essentialism is true.

### 3.3 The Social Construction of Gender

If one acknowledges that only this highest ideal of a man that Mitchell describes can properly perform the role of a combat soldier, then the case for women in combat seems doomed from the start. However, Mitchell accepts, without question, certain assumptions about gender constitution that seem highly suspicious. The ideological traditionalism that Mitchell has adopted assumes that men and women are naturally very different, and, as a result, men and women have different roles to play. Without being aware of it, Mitchell uses the terms sex and gender interchangeably, but they are clearly not the same thing.

On the issue of sex and gender Sally Haslanger writes,

(...) One might want to draw a distinction between sex and gender, *sex* being an anatomical distinction based on locally salient sexual/reproductive differences [between males and females], and *gender* being a distinction between the social/political positions of those with bodies marked as of different sexes.<sup>43</sup>

By Haslanger's definition, sex is determined by biological factors, such as type of genitalia, and the range of characteristics that portrays masculinity and femininity determines gender for social/political reasons. The traditionalist demands a strict adherence to the characteristics that usually go with being male or female, since he finds

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<sup>43</sup> Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Social Construction: Who? What? When? Where? How?" in *Theorizing Feminisms: A Reader*, ed. Elisabeth Hackett and Sally Haslanger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20.

that these are the *best* ways to be either male or female. Mitchell frowns upon persons of one particular biological sex who portray characteristics usually associated with the opposite sex, such as masculine women, as they seem defective in his eyes (I will revisit this claim in Section 3.4).

The idea of social construction provides a suitable framework for criticizing Mitchell's assumptions about sex and gender. Many philosophers have used various theoretical structures to argue that ontological social categories, such as 'woman,' 'man,' 'mother,' and 'wife,' are in fact social constructs. Simone de Beauvoir famously proclaimed that "one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman," and that 'woman' is defined by way of her relation to 'man' as 'the other,' a weaker version of 'man.' Maurice Merleau-Ponty argued, true to phenomenology, that the body is "an historical idea" rather than "a natural species."<sup>44</sup> If the body is a historical idea it must be understood as an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities. In the same fashion Michel Foucault wrote, " (...) the notion of 'sex' made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle."<sup>45</sup> One could then say that the idea of "a natural sex" accompanied by "natural traits" is instead a cultural construct that serves reproductive interests. Thus, rather than being 'natural,' what it means to be a 'woman,' 'mother,' or 'wife' is constituted through social reality.

Haslanger has theorized extensively about social construction and gender. She

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<sup>44</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2014), 156.

<sup>45</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 154.

rejects the more radical notion of social construction, such as the claim that reality itself is socially constructed, and instead she holds the view that gender is real, but also constituted through social practices. This is in line with the thinking of Catharine MacKinnon, who writes,

Epistemologically speaking, women know the male world is out there because it hits them in the face. No matter how they think about it, try to think it out of existence or into a different shape, it remains independently real, keeps forcing them into certain molds. No matter what they think or do, they cannot get out of it. It has all the indeterminacy of a bridge abutment hit at sixty miles per hour.<sup>46</sup>

Consequently, the understanding of how someone perceived as female “becomes” a woman has to be set within the wide range of social and cultural processes that make up our reality, which is still very much the “male world” that MacKinnon refers to.

Furthermore, Haslanger argues that gender is both an idea-construction and an object construction:

[1] Gender is an idea construction because the *classification* men/women is the contingent result of historical events and forces.

[2] (...) Women and men—concrete individuals—are constructed *as gendered kinds of people*, i.e. we are each object constructions.<sup>47</sup>

Both types of construction are examples of social causation, namely, “(...) to say that something is socially constructed is to say that it is caused to be a certain way, and the causal process involves social factors (...).”<sup>48</sup> Regarding [1], the military serves as a good example of how gender as an idea-construction becomes manifested. The sexual division of labor has historically made the military men’s domain, presumably because men, on average, have been physically stronger than women. As a result, the idea that soldiering

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<sup>46</sup> Catharine MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 123.

<sup>47</sup> Haslanger, “Gender and Social Construction: Who? What? When? Where? How?” 19.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

was a job strictly for men became widely socially accepted. Likewise, the historical exclusion of women from the military has served to entrench certain ideas about women's physical capabilities. It is no coincidence that women throughout history have been relegated to a role in the home, as the gender classification of 'woman' has historically kept her out of public affairs.

As for [2], gender classification takes place within a complex matrix of social practices and institutions, and whatever classification an individual finds him/herself under is extremely impactful on that person's self-perception.<sup>49</sup> It is with this in mind that Haslanger writes that we are object-constructions as "gendered kinds of people." Even though we are constructs we are still real, concrete individuals, meaning we actually exist in the world within the conceptual framework of social construction. This idea dispels the more radical notion that all of reality is, in fact, socially constructed.

Theories of social construction take various forms, but I hope I have said enough to make it clear why Mitchell's reliance on gender essentialism, in the strict sense, is problematic. It is not possible to explain what a woman is from her anatomy (reproductive organs) and the perceived traditional properties that are assumed to accompany that particular anatomy. This is because "being a woman is a function of [her] role in a social framework."<sup>50</sup> The social framework for women in the Western world is still one maintained by the patriarchy, despite how far we have come with regards to women's rights in the last hundred years or so.

MacKinnon argues that gender is not only a question of social construction, but also one of power. Within the patriarchal framework in the U.S. no other institution

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 19

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 20.

exemplifies and exudes male power and dominance like the U.S. military. This, in turn, has had a direct impact on the social construction of gender roles. MacKinnon argues that it seems pointless for feminists to argue for equality through either the “sameness theory of sex” (women are the same as men) or the “difference theory of sex” (women are different from men). Instead she suggests abandoning these two approaches to “the gender question” for an alternative one, the dominance approach. She writes,

Gender is also a question of power, specifically of male supremacy and female subordination. The question of equality, from the standpoint of what it is going to take to get it, is at root a question of hierarchy, which—as power succeeds in constructing social perception and social reality—derivatively becomes a categorical distinction, a difference. Here, on the first day that matters, dominance was achieved, probably by force. By the second day, division along the same lines had to be relatively firmly in place. On the third day, if not sooner, differences were demarcated, together with social systems to exaggerate them in perception and in fact, *because* the systematically differential delivery of benefits and deprivations required making no mistake about who was who. Comparatively speaking, man has been resting ever since. Gender might not even code as difference, might not mean distinction epistemologically, were it not for its consequences for social power.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, the commonly accepted binary division of gender, male and female, functions as a division of power. Feminists, such as MacKinnon and Haslanger, aim to eliminate gender, as this would abolish the grounds for the social hierarchy and the oppression of women altogether. Letting women serve in any job for which they are qualified in the military would be one way to start eliminating gender and change the current power structure. The historical concentration of power in the hands of men describes “(...) the systematic relegation of an entire group of people [women] to a condition of inferiority and attributes it to their nature.”<sup>52</sup> Women’s relegation to the role of other, to a gender that is

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<sup>51</sup> Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 40.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.



not as powerful as men's, has, for the most part, systematically ensured that women have had no wide ranging influence in military matters. More than any other institution in the United States the military has been created, maintained, and run by men. Traditionalists like Mitchell are understandably hesitant to give up power. Giving up power means making way for social change, and that can be a frightening prospect. A shift in the perception of gender, if not the complete elimination thereof, is threatening to the current state of the power structure, and to the traditionalist, this idea is close to inconceivable.

The dominance approach is a question of the distribution of power, and since power is politics, it is a question of politics. According to MacKinnon, politics is to blame for the "deep structure of society," and politics are responsible for the systematic dominance of men over women, as well as male supremacy.<sup>53</sup> It is exactly for these reasons that feminists and egalitarians should be concerned when political or oppressive powers insist on unchangeable essences within the ontology of social categories. Mitchell, as a man used to the role of an authority figure to men in the Army, is a product of, as well as an enforcer for, the patriarchal political powers. Mitchell's insistence that men and women have different roles to play, based on gender, is a way for him to extend the political powers of the patriarchy and to uphold the status quo and the unequal distribution of power.

### 3.4 Norms, the Body, and Punitive Consequences

By now it should be apparent that Mitchell's contention about true masculine identities is problematic. There seems to be no middle ground between the traditionalist's

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 42.

highly idealized masculine status of the ‘combat soldier’ and the traditional descriptions of ‘woman’ as caring, nurturing, polite, pretty, and so forth. Furthermore, theories of social construction make us question the validity of these tradition-based social categories. As in the case of power, gender, as a construct, relies on social norms and an emphasis on the physical body. Next I am going to argue that the exclusion-from-combat policy has served as a punitive consequence for women who might otherwise have attempted to stray from the socially constructed category of ‘woman.’

It makes sense to think of gender roles as culturally written scripts. From our respective cultures we obtain clues and storylines that direct us in our attempt to imitate socially accepted behaviors and attributes particular to our sex. For example, a white woman from a middleclass family in New York City will adhere to a different script, and therefore to different social norms, than an African American woman born and raised in rural Alabama. Different environments dictate different norms, and while there are some general norms for what constitutes femininity, which I will discuss shortly, norms are also determined by other factors such as geographical location and socio-economic status.

Sandra Lee Bartky argues that Foucault’s work on the “emergence of a new and unprecedented discipline against the body” has a particular dimension to it that pertains to women.<sup>54</sup> Historically, the bodily experiences of men and women have not been the same, and Foucault does not take into account the disciplines that have been particular to women and the peculiar feminine embodiment that has been a result thereof.<sup>55</sup> The social scripts we take our clues from center on the physical body, and it is from the visual

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<sup>54</sup> Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 63.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

appearance of our body that we are supposed to know which gender norms to adhere to. Bartkly writes, “We are born male and female, but not masculine and feminine,” and so it is the social norms that dictate our scripts.<sup>56</sup> Norms can be considered disciplines, in the sense that Foucault used the term “disciplines,” as they serve to change conduct, encourage conformity, and discourage deviating behavior.

Social norms have punitive consequences when they are not followed. When a woman proclaims that she wants to serve in combat or take the fight to the enemy’s front door, she is acting outside the general script for her social category. In other words, she deviates from established norms and from common perceptions about the way the sexes are supposed to act. For example, if a young girl in her teens talks about joining the military because she thinks she will enjoy that kind of life and career, she is, for the most part, quickly labeled a tomboy, and friends and family might try to discourage her from joining. A ‘tomboy’ is a deviator from the category of ‘woman,’ and as a society we are quick to label people who stray from the category they have otherwise been assigned to.

In support of this suggestion Judith Butler writes,

Performing one’s gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all. That this reassurance is so easily displaced by anxiety, that culture so readily punishes or marginalizes those who fail to perform the illusion of gender essentialism should be sign enough that on some level there is social knowledge that the truth or falsity of gender is only socially compelled and in no sense ontologically necessitated.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, the fear of punishment for not meeting social norms works as a deterrent for

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>57</sup> Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 528. Butler does think gender is strictly a performance and a process, and consequently, that there are no ontological categories. However, her ideas about punitive consequences for performing gender wrong are still valuable to my argument.

individuals who might not want to conform.

The girl or woman who gets labeled ‘tomboy’ will be juxtaposed with women who follow the current social norms of what it means to be ‘in style’ as a woman. Currently, the style seems to be focused on ‘sexy.’ As Bartky puts it, “Normative femininity is coming more and more to be centered on woman’s body—not its duties and obligations or even its capacity to have children, but its sexuality (...).”<sup>58</sup> The ‘sexy woman’ knows how to make her body the center of attention, and she becomes who she is because of her body. Popular styles of the female body have varied over time and across cultures, but today’s current body in style is “taut, small-breasted, narrow-hipped, and of a slimness bordering on emaciation (...).”<sup>59</sup> Against this backdrop, the so-called tomboy might feel a sense of disconnection since she will want to fit in and be thought of as sexy too, but meanwhile she is drawn to the activities that earn her the label ‘tomboy.’ As a result, she is conflicted over who she is, over how she wants to be perceived, and over how she is actually perceived.

When it comes to women in combat there is a very particular image that does not match the perceived category of ‘woman’ well. This is the image of ‘woman’ as a killer. Put differently, it is not a social norm in most societies that women display strength and a willingness to kill. A woman who kills acts contrary to the properties perceived to be in her ontological makeup. By being willing to not only kill other people, but also to put herself in harm’s way, she is grossly violating her assigned social script. Stepping outside social gender norms leads to punishment, and punishment in this sense is used as a control mechanism. By making policies that have stopped women from serving in combat

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<sup>58</sup> Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, 80.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

positions, women have preemptively been deterred from stepping outside their acceptable social norms.

Bartky has written at length about the disciplinary practices a woman undertakes in an attempt to meet society's norms and expectations for her body and her femininity. These disciplinary practices involve dieting, exercising, and controlling body and facial movements in social settings. As Bartky puts it, "Feminine movement, gesture, and posture must exhibit not only constriction, but grace as well, and a certain eroticism restrained by modesty (...)." <sup>60</sup> But it does not stop there, as "(...) [a] woman's body is an ornamented surface too, and there is much discipline involved in this production as well." <sup>61</sup> To ornament the surface she must maintain beautifully manicured long nails, spend a substantial amount of money caring for her hair, and she must wear dresses and high heels once in a while. A woman is "supposed" to smell good, spend an extensive amount of time taking care of her skin, and invest in a large variety of makeup as well as various lotions and soaps.

The disciplinary practices have in many ways crippled women and made them less practically functional than men. For example, men are not socially required to get up extra early in the morning to fix their hair, do their makeup, or drive around town for waxing/hair/nail appointments. The beauty standards that derive from the disciplinary practices take valuable time away from women that they could otherwise have spent on activities of their own liking. Additionally, women are hurt by the disciplinary practices financially, as women spend more money on products, such as cosmetics, clothes, and beauty supplies, than men do. With the demanding disciplinary practices in mind, it is no

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 69.

wonder that the perceived category of ‘combat soldier’ seems incompatible with the perceived category of ‘woman.’ The combat soldier cannot be worried about breaking a nail or whether or not he remembered to put anti-aging serum under his eyelids in the morning. Instead he is filthy, foul-mouthed, and displays an aggressive body language. He is everything that the disciplinary practices prevent a woman from becoming.

The exclusion-from-combat policy has served as a punitive consequence for women who might otherwise have attempted to stray from traditional norms. Through all the years the combat exclusion policy has been in place it has served as a precautionary measure, designed by legislators (with the support of traditionalists in the military as well as in the public) to uphold traditionally perceived gender categories and gender dichotomies. With this in mind, the punitive consequences that result from a failure to conform to social norms should not be underestimated.

## 4 WHY WOMEN SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO SERVE IN COMBAT

So far I have shown how Mitchell, as a traditionalist, adheres to very strict gender categories and how this view is at odds with theories of social construction. In the following section I will argue for why women should be allowed to serve in combat for two specific reasons. First, Mitchell's position, which can be classified as gender essentialism, relies on the idea that men and women can be classified ontologically as good and bad kinds of men and women. However, this view often represents falsehoods, or social fictions, about women, as it is static and often hostile in its attempt to fit all women into the same narrow category. Second, since the Gulf War women have already served on the front lines despite the Combat Exclusion policy, and evidence shows that some women are fully capable of performing combat-related jobs.

### 4.1 Dispelling Social Fictions

If one accepts the idea that gender constitution is culturally designed to fit norms, then one has reason to worry about the punitive consequences that befall deviators from the different categories. As previously discussed, deviators are punished for not possessing certain properties that are perceived as essential to their respective category. In other words, they are punished for being defective kinds. Kinds in this sense are broadly speaking the classifications of social kinds such as 'woman,' 'man,' 'soldier,'

mother,’ and so forth. Since the traditionalist believes that deviators from these classifications are defective kinds, he assumes that there are better or worse kinds, such as a ‘good woman’ or a ‘bad combat soldier.’ To be considered a defective kind in this strict sense a person would have had to act outside the bounds of traditional social norms. To Mitchell, the woman who thinks she can become a combat soldier is most certainly a defective kind. While describing a recruiting campaign with the slogan “American’s Finest Women Stand Beside Her Finest Men” led by the DoD in the early 1950s, Mitchell suggests that the slogans did nothing “aside from insulting the majority of American womanhood.”<sup>62</sup> What he suggests is that a woman willing to fight alongside men is a shameful and defective representation of the traditional category of ‘woman.’

Traditional gender categories work within a binary framework that assumes the need for only two classifications: man and woman. One particular case related to the military illuminates how traditional gender categories work to make people conform and fear punishment. Kirsten Beck is a transgendered woman, who, before coming out in 2011, served as a U.S. Navy SEAL and deployed 13 times. As a male, Beck went by the name Christopher Beck, and since grade school she had felt trapped in the wrong body. As a biological male, Beck felt pressured, both from fear of prejudice and violence against her person, to be a man, and she says she chose to join the Navy SEALs to hide in the world of “the toughest of the tough.”<sup>63</sup> During her time in the SEALs she kept up the facade of being part of the brotherhood, but inside she was miserable and uncomfortable in her own skin. In an interview with CNN Beck said, “I am not a gay man, I am not a

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<sup>62</sup> Mitchell, *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster*, 9.

<sup>63</sup> Susan Chun, Dana Ford, and Chuck Hadad, “Transgender ex-Navy SEAL lives in ‘gray world’,” *CNN*, September 4, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/03/us/lady-valor-kristin-beck-transgender-navy-seal-interview/>



drag queen, I am not maybe total dude, and I am not total feminine (...) I think I'm living more in that gray world.”<sup>64</sup>

That gray world that Beck refers to is the world that we need to try to understand. Despite identifying more with a gender category that is different from the one culturally assigned to her as a biological male, Beck served her country and she did it well. Those should be the issues that we care about. One might argue that she at least had the physical strength of a man, but it seems inconceivable that Beck would have been able to serve for as long as she did in the Navy SEALs if she had revealed the gender with which she identified. The stigma from such a revelation would most likely have been traumatic for Beck, and it would have resulted in punitive consequences, since feminine gender characteristics have long been thought of as a reason for exclusion in the military. The point is that no man or woman should have to hide his or her gender identification if they are capable of doing their job well.

It is not only men who judge whether or not a social kind is defective or not. Women also do it all the time. As an example, Bartky writes, “The ‘art’ of make-up is the art of disguise, but this presupposes that a woman’s face, unpainted, is defective.”<sup>65</sup> So even without being a traditionalist it is easy to fall into the trap of believing that we will be defective if we do not adhere to certain social norms. To some women it is incomprehensible to go out into the world without a face that has carefully been applied makeup. This could be because some women really do believe that wearing makeup actually matters and that they feel more empowered by having “adorned faces.” It could also be the case that some women have never stopped to wonder why exactly they bother

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, 71.

putting on makeup. Instead, they have just accepted, without inquiry and justification, that makeup is something that women are “supposed” to use.

This example raises the important question: how do norms get their authority? Why do women abide by these norms if there is no enforcement mechanism? The answer is that women willingly follow norms to avoid punitive consequences. Women know that if they do not conform to normative femininity they will face scrutiny and feel shame. The scrutiny and shame are related to how women might be perceived by men. Bartky writes,

In the regime of institutionalized heterosexuality woman must make herself object and prey for the man: It is for him that these eyes are limpid pools, this cheek baby-smooth. In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: They stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other. (...) The disciplinary power that inscribes femininity in the female body is everywhere and it is nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular.<sup>66</sup>

This anonymous enforcement of discipline on women is what Bartky calls the modernization of patriarchal power. In some ways, Mitchell does not need to point out what he perceives women to be; women already police themselves in the attempt to live up to the high expectations set by social norms of what it means to be a woman.

Social norms’ focus on the movement and adornment of women’s bodies is a way for the patriarchy to turn women into “(...) the docile and compliant companions of men (...).<sup>67</sup> Women cannot be equal players in the military, business, or politics when they constantly have to stop and wonder if they will face scrutiny for being defective as women. In *The Beauty Myth* Naomi Wolf argues that the standards women are held to are

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 72, 74.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 75.

unrealistic. She writes, “The beauty myth is not about women at all. It is about men’s institutions and institutional power.”<sup>68</sup> So some social norms are in place to serve the power structure and to make sure every subordinate stays within her place in the hierarchy. By distracting women with myths of beauty and by making women their own enforcers the patriarchy has found a successful way to control women and keep them out of historical male domains such as the military.

Some social norms can be oppressive and help maintain social fictions about what it means to be a woman. When the pictures of the first two female soldiers to graduate from the Army Ranger School<sup>69</sup> hit the press, some people were quick to make condescending remarks about the two women’s shaved heads. In a society where women are praised for having long hair, it is near impossible for women to avoid scrutiny if they do not conform to appearance norms, but the suggestion that a woman with long hair is a better kind of woman than a woman with short hair seems silly, and it is purely a work of social fiction. However, social fictions still have a tremendous impact, just like Wolf’s beauty myth, on how women perceive themselves, and they do not change the fact that gender is ‘real.’ To second this, Haslanger writes,

Although some ideas about gender are fictions, these fictional ideas have functioned to create and reinforce gender reality, i.e. hierarchical social groups based on beliefs about reproductive differences, that are all too real. These categories of people are, I would argue, not just ideas, but are social entities.<sup>70</sup>

Social fictions and myths are employed as tools by the power structure to avoid a shift in power.

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<sup>68</sup> Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* (New York: Willam Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 13.

<sup>69</sup> I will discuss women and Army Ranger School in detail in Section 4.3.

<sup>70</sup> Haslanger, “Gender and Social Construction: Who? What? When? Where? How?” 22.

Mitchell is particularly guilty of accepting myths of gender. In a reference to women joining the military during World War II, he writes, "Many Americans could only believe that the kind of women who would join the Army were not the kind to take home to mother."<sup>71</sup> He also claims that, "The truth is that women enjoy preference and protection in a variety of forms."<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, he argues, "Single parenthood would not exist if there were no women in the services," and he concludes "... Single parents in the military are a sorry lot."<sup>73</sup> The examples listed are just a fraction of the many social fictions about gender that Mitchell accepts as being true. Embedded in his view is the assumption that a woman willing to fight is only willing to fight because no man wants to marry her. To Mitchell a woman is also a helpless creature who desires paternalistic protection, and he assumes that the social, economic, and practical problems that come from being a single mother are only the problem and responsibility of the woman.

Not only do his examples reinforce the problem of defective kinds, but his rhetoric also borders on being misogynistic. Some of the chapter titles in his two books about women in the military have the suggestive titles "The Last Class With Balls," "The G.I. Jane Deception," "From Here to Maternity," and "Today's Charmed Forces," which all allude to stereotypical gender dichotomies. The problem is that Mitchell accepts each and every stereotype and social fiction created about women. He cannot get past the fact that since women were let into the service academies in 1976 the military has been steadily changing, and he wants a return to the "good old days" when the military was only men's business.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 342.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 158.

To move away from a view such as Mitchell's, social fictions have to be dispelled. Women have to be convinced that they do not need to rely on myths to be successful. If women can be convinced of that, it would lessen the fear of punitive consequences for being a defective kind of woman. Along with the beauty myth and other social fictions, a myth has also been told about women in combat. Because of all the constraints social norms have put on women, it has seemed "natural" that women did not have a place in the foxhole. However, women have been kept out of combat, not because it was "natural," but because it served the self-interest of the power structure.

One way to dispel the myth about what women are is to demonstrate that it is false. I intend to do so in the next section by showing that women are not only capable, but they are also already serving in forward operating positions in war zones.

#### 4.2 Women Are Already Serving "Forward on the Battlefield"

Since 2001 close to 200 servicewomen have been killed in action overseas, and in the same timeframe a little over 1,000 servicewomen have been wounded in action.<sup>74</sup> These numbers are low compared to the numbers of servicemen (since 2001 almost 6700 men have been killed in action and over 51,000 have been wounded<sup>75</sup>), but considering the combat exclusion policies that have been in effect, the numbers for women seem high. On the reports specifying the causes of death for the servicewomen the causes range from hostile fire such as IED attack, small arms attack, suicide bombers, helicopter/plane

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<sup>74</sup> Department of Defense, Defense Casualty Analysis System, *Conflict Casualties*, January 1, 2016, <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/pages/casualties.xhtml>

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

crash, and rocket fire. Only a handful of the deaths are listed as nonhostile causes.<sup>76</sup> By looking at the causes of death it becomes obvious that women have *not* been kept out of combat areas, or what the 1994 Direct Ground Combat and Assignment Rule referred to as being “forward on the battlefield.” The rule had prohibited women from participating in direct ground combat with an enemy while being exposed to hostile fire, but the casualty reports told a different story.

That women have served forward on the battlefield is not only something learned in hindsight from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also from the Gulf War, as some women were deployed in positions where direct combat was a distinct possibility.<sup>77</sup> The battlefields that American troops have found themselves on in the Middle East since the Gulf War have been unlike any previous battlefields the nation has ever been on. Instead of linear battles, in which fighting forces meet lined up face to face, such as at the battle at Gettysburg (1863) and the Normandy Invasion (1944), today’s warfare is often urban and asymmetrical. The adversaries in the Middle East have followed unconventional warfare methods, such as insurgency and guerilla tactics, and in environments where the battlefield is all around, it has been impossible to enforce the combat exclusion policy for women. It has simply not been realistic to expect women to stay out of danger when the risk turned out to be everywhere.

In this kind of modern warfare combat and support roles are only separated by a thin line, and it seems that the services have been aware of this for a while despite the exclusion policy. For example, in 2003 various changes to the Army culture were instated

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<sup>76</sup> Michael White, icasualties.org, 2009, <http://icasualties.org/OEF/Fatalities.aspx> (accessed January 5, 2016).

<sup>77</sup> Skaine, *Women at War: Gender Issues of Americans in Combat*, 25.

to make ‘the Soldier’ the main focus area. The Army wanted to “ensure all soldiers, without regard to unit, gender, or military occupation specialty, were properly trained and equipped for the challenges of the modern battlefield.”<sup>78</sup> With the changes came a new focus on the soldier as a warrior, and further changes were implemented to support the warrior mindset.<sup>79</sup> 39 Warrior Tasks were established for new soldiers going through Basic Combat Training (BCT) along with nine battle drills. These tasks and drills were meant to prepare soldiers for combat, and were described as follows,

Warrior Tasks: included qualifying with numerous weapons, reacting to indirect fire, reacting to direct fire, man-to-man contact (combatives), engaging targets during an urban operation, and entering a building during an urban operation.

Battle Drills: included reacting to contact (visual, IED, direct fire, and rocket propelled grenades), reacting to an ambush on blocked and unblocked roadways, reacting to indirect fire, and evacuating injured personnel from a vehicle.<sup>80</sup>

With the new training in BCT and women’s assignments downrange, the contradiction between what women were actually doing and what the rules said they were allowed to do became even more obvious than before.

#### 4.3 Abilities and Fair Standards

Another way of dispelling the myth about what women are is to test it against an idea of fairness. The real issue here should not be sex or gender, but abilities and fair standards. As long as a woman can meet a fairly set standard for a particular job, then she should be able to hold that job. Women can adapt and learn well, and as with any job, it

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<sup>78</sup> Michele M. Putko, “The Combat Exclusion Policy in the Modern Security Environment,” in “Women in Combat Compendium,” ed. Michele M. Putko and Douglas V. Johnson II, *Strategic Studies Institute* (2008): 31.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 31.

should go to the most qualified person. Mitchell even concedes that women are better behaved than men because they do not miss as much time as men for disciplinary reasons, and they are less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol.<sup>81</sup>

Despite conceding that women are generally well behaved in the military, Mitchell does not think this one advantage outweighs the many disadvantages.<sup>82</sup> Bluntly put, Mitchell claims that women cannot measure up to what men can do in the military. Two factors make this assumption questionable. First, women have not been legally allowed to do exactly what men have done, such as serve in the infantry or armor, so there is no way to compare if women measure up in these specific jobs. It is not possible to blame women for not measuring up if they have never actually been allowed to even attempt to do the job. However, a lot of women have served “forward on the battlefield,” and they have done so in a professional and efficient manner. One battalion commander’s observations from the ground in the Baghdad area support this impression. When Colonel Paul L. Grosskruger was deployed with the 94<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion in Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003), he observed, “(...) women combat leaders, who, in concert with their male counterparts, accomplished incredible feats in complex and dangerous circumstances (...).”<sup>83</sup> What Colonel Grosskruger learned from commanding a mixed-sex unit was that effective leadership is based on factors other than gender, and he saw the same desirable leadership attributes in the women officers that he saw in the men, namely

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<sup>81</sup> Mitchell, *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster*, 349.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 349.

<sup>83</sup> Paul L. Grosskruger, “Women Leaders in Combat: One Commander’s Perspective,” in “Women in Combat Compendium,” ed. Michele M. Putko and Douglas V. Johnson II, *Strategic Studies Institute* (2008): 45.



patriotism, technical and tactical expertise, and professionalism.<sup>84</sup> These should be the attributes that determine whether or not someone is a good soldier and/or officer. The women officers that Colonel Grosskruger observed in his unit were first and foremost soldiers when it came time to get the job done.

Second, assuming that women do not “measure up” carries the implication that women cannot do what men can do. Retired Army major Lillian Pfluke, a graduate from the first class of women at West Point in 1980, calls this assumption a red herring since “differences in physical ability exist between the genders, but some of those same differences exist within each gender. The differences within one gender are the crux of the issue.”<sup>85</sup> Many men would not last one day in BCT, let alone infantry MOS school or Ranger School, so the premise that men can do things that women are incapable of is false. If the issue is considered as one of fairness then it does not matter if *all* women can do what men can do, but only that *some* can. As a matter of fairness the particular women who are able to make it through any combat-related MOS school should be allowed to serve in that position.

In August of 2015 two women, captain Kristen Griest and 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Shaye Haver, both West Point graduates, graduated from the grueling Army Ranger School. The Army Ranger School is a 61-day combat leadership course that emphasizes small unit tactics. The school is notorious for being both physically and mentally demanding. Opponents of women in combat positions were quick to accuse the Army of lowering its standards so the women could pass. Representative Steven Russell, a Republican from Oklahoma, who is also a retired colonel and Ranger graduate, has been very vocal about

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>85</sup> Skaine, *Women at War: Gender Issues of Americans in Combat*, 185.

his disapproval. More specifically, he has demanded that the Army release training records for Captain Griest and 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Haver, as he believes the women were given unfair advantages through multiple attempts at passing the course.<sup>86</sup> The Army has responded to Russell and explained that not all training records are kept after graduation, and that the ones that are cannot be released due to the Privacy Act. The Army has provided Russell with an informational study about Ranger School and the respective performances of both male and female students. The study concluded that the performances of the women were on par with the men's.<sup>87</sup>

At a Ranger School graduation in August 2015 Major General Scott Miller, commanding general from the Maneuver Center of Excellence, addressed the allegations of preferential treatment of women by calling out the “noisy and inaccurate” critics. General Miller said,

(...) [Ranger Assessment Phase] week has not changed. Standards remain the same. The five-mile run is still five miles. The 12-mile march is still 12 miles. The required weight of the students' rucksacks has stayed the same, the mountains of Dahlonaga [Georgia] are still here, the swamps remain intact.<sup>88</sup>

Despite the controversy there is no doubt that the majority of men in the United States could not have passed the course. Granted, only a very small percentage of women would actually make it through the course as well, but it is unfair, and a direct appeal to traditional gender categories, to unabashedly assume that women will never make the cut.

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<sup>86</sup> Jesse Byrnes, “GOP Lawmaker Questions Test Scores of Female Army Rangers,” *The Hill*, September 22, 2015, <http://thehill.com/policy/defense/254579-lawmaker-probing-whether-female-army-rangers-received-special-treatment>

<sup>87</sup> Michelle Tan, “Army Stats: Women Performed Comparably to Men in Ranger School,” *Army Times*, November 11, 2015, <http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/capitol-hill/2015/11/11/army-responds-congressmans-ranger-school-records-request/75584150/>

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

The constant assessment of fair standards for both men and woman is crucial to women's success in combat positions. All branches of the military have testable physical fitness standards for all personnel regardless of MOS, and the standards are used to measure a minimum standard of physical fitness across all the military branches. The standards are measured through a physical test and scored according to age and gender to account for physiological differences.<sup>89</sup> For example, for the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) both sexes must do as many push-ups as they can in two minutes, as many sit-ups as they can in two minutes, and run two miles within an allowed timeframe. For instance, for the APFT a 20 year-old man must do a minimum of 42 push-ups, 53 sit-ups, and run two miles in 15:54 minutes or less, whereas a 20 year-old woman must do a minimum of 19 push-ups, 53 sit-ups, and complete the run in 18:48 minutes or less to pass the test.<sup>90</sup> A woman who can do the same or more than a man of her own age is then considered to be more physically fit, with regard to muscular strength, endurance, and cardiovascular capacity.<sup>91</sup>

Mitchell's main claim about the ineffectiveness of women in the military rests on the fact that there are these different standards for men and women regarding physical fitness. He finds this fact to be sufficient evidence for why women cannot perform as well as men in the military. However, what Mitchell does not consider is that the AFPT measures the minimum standard of physical fitness that will be accepted in the Army. This does not mean that women are incapable of surpassing the standards. Some women

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<sup>89</sup> Kamarck, "Women in Combat: Issues for Congress," 15.

<sup>90</sup> Army Physical Fitness Test Score Card, in accordance with FM 21-20, [http://www.usarec.army.mil/downloads/mrb/AECP/Application\\_Process/DA\\_form\\_705\\_APFT\\_scorecard.pdf](http://www.usarec.army.mil/downloads/mrb/AECP/Application_Process/DA_form_705_APFT_scorecard.pdf) (accessed December 17, 2015).

<sup>91</sup> Kamarck, "Women in Combat: Issues for Congress," 15.

who are extremely athletic can do much better than the minimum standard, and likewise, some men who are less athletically inclined can potentially fall below the standard.

Importantly, in addition to the minimum standard of fitness set for all members of the military, some MOSs (such as infantry and artillery) require a person to maintain a higher level of fitness because the jobs are more physically demanding. Kate Wheeling writes,

These tests [fitness tests for jobs such as infantry and artillery] are meant to measure not just physical fitness, but a soldier's ability to meet specific job requirements that aren't always easy (or cheap) to test; they serve as a proxy for a soldier's ability to, say, rappel out of a helicopter, or carry a wounded comrade to safety.<sup>92</sup>

Working in jobs such as the infantry or the artillery is more physically demanding and requires a higher level of strength or fitness than, for example, a supply specialist or a cook. Thus, there are different standards for general military service and for combat service. Even as an advocate for women in combat positions, I am not disputing that, but I am questioning Mitchell's assumption that women are incapable of surpassing the minimum standards of physical fitness.

It should not matter if the job candidate for a military job requiring a high level of fitness is a man or a woman since assessing whether or not a person is qualified to do a particular job is no different from other jobs where a person must have additional skills, such as knowledge of another language or specific medical training. However, the worry is whether the standards set for these specialized MOSs are fair for what is actually required of the job. If the bar is set unnecessarily high, then it will create artificial barriers

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<sup>92</sup> Kate Wheeling, "Does It Really Matter If Women Soldiers Can't Do Pull-ups?" Pacific Standard, December 4, 2015, <http://www.psmag.com/health-and-behavior/does-it-really-matter-if-women-soldiers-cant-do-pull-ups>

for women who are interested in joining those particular fields.<sup>93</sup> Evidence shows that the military has been guilty of using unfair fitness standards to unfairly keep women out of certain fields. In an example from the early 1980s, a group of female soldiers at Fort Bragg, North Carolina asked for an opportunity to serve in the Army's communication branch. As a test the women were asked to lift and move massive spools of telephone wire. The task proved impossible for the women, but it was later disclosed that men could not lift or move the spools either.<sup>94</sup> The necessity of women's ability to perform pull-ups is another example of a 'valuable fitness standard' that has long been disputed. Secretary Carter's decision to open all military positions to women is partly a result of the military branches' review of standards that has been in process in recent years.

In addition to the assessment of abilities and ensuring fair standards, the changes in technology on the modern battlefield also help the case for women in combat. Today's battlefield is very reliant on technology, and women have capabilities equal to those of men when it comes to working with technology. Some areas of the military do not require the sheer use of physical strength (I will revisit the very important issue of physical strength in Section 5.1), and Rosemarie Skaine suggests that "Air power, nuclear technology, and smaller weapons contribute to the possibility of women serving in combat."<sup>95</sup> Whereas some jobs used to required an 8-mile march with an 80-pound pack, technology has now lessened some of the physical burdens from these particular jobs, since for example, lighter vehicles and better technological equipment have reduced the

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<sup>93</sup> Kamarck, "Women in Combat: Issues for Congress," 15.

<sup>94</sup> Wheeling, "Does It Really Matter If Women Soldiers Can't Do Pull-ups?"

<sup>95</sup> Skaine, *Women at War: Gender Issues of Americans in Combat*, 154.

need for long marches with full gear.<sup>96</sup> As such, the military can accommodate more recruits and enlistees who are not just pure physical strength, but who have a variety of different skills to bring to the table.

The view I have suggested of women in combat positions is a positive one. Women have been serving honorably in dangerous forward positions for years now, and despite the entrenched traditionalist's position and the appeal to gender essentialism, women have proven that they have what it takes. Technology has further enabled the accommodation of women in combat roles, and gender myths about what women are and what they are capable of are starting to look more and more like what they are- pure works of fiction.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 185.

## 5 OBJECTIONS TO WOMEN IN COMBAT POSITIONS

Although I have presented arguments for the perceived ontological conflict between ‘woman’ and ‘combat soldier’ and for why women are capable of serving in combat, it is unlikely that the traditionalist will accept my arguments without questions. Here in the final section I shall examine three main objections from the traditionalist that on the surface seem to bring along some worrisome implications. On Mitchell’s list of mountains of evidence for the damaging effects of woman in the military he includes the problem of depending on soldier-mothers with young children, the problem of inserting female bodies into old-fashioned all-male institutions such as the Citadel and the VMI, adultery, inferior physical strength, and the dangerous effects of sex-based integration on safety and standards.<sup>97</sup> The common thread in all the objections is the focus on the woman’s body, as Mitchell simply assumes that a woman is her body. I will argue that focusing solely on the woman’s body is misleading since, as previously explained, social factors play an equally important role.

### 5.1 Objection #1: A Woman’s Body Is the Embodiment of Weakness

Traditionalists argue that women cannot and should not be in combat positions because their bodies are naturally physically weak. They simply do not possess the core strength that men have. Mitchell writes, “Nowhere in the military do women meet the

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<sup>97</sup> Mitchell, *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster*, xv.

same physical standards as men (...).”<sup>98</sup> The look at the traditionalist’s perception of the ontology of ‘woman’ revealed a view advocating essentialism (Section 3.2), namely that the category of ‘woman’ necessarily contains certain properties. If these properties are deemed to be absent a woman will be thought of as ‘defective.’ In addition to essentialism, the claim that women’s physical weakness is a cause for exclusion from combat positions is a claim to biological determinism. As such, “biology is destiny” for opponents of women in combat.

Opponents often point out that women have comparatively less upper-body strength than men, and they are “more likely to experience stress fractures, ACL tears, and other overuse injuries.”<sup>99</sup> Due to these factors, women are less likely to be able to carry heavy loads for long distances or maintain the fitness level of their male peers. This raises safety concerns when put into the context of combat. If one person cannot carry his or her load, then not only will that person put other service members’ lives at risk, but he or she will also jeopardize the mission.

The issues that arise from questioning levels of fitness are indeed serious, and I do agree that men are generally physically stronger than women. This is due to the fact that women have more body fat and men have greater muscle mass because of testosterone-induced muscular hypertrophy. However, I do not find this enough of a reason to exclude all women from combat positions. Outside of the fantasy world of gender essentialism, in which men and women play unique traditional roles, there exist physically fit, tough

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>99</sup> Dave Kelm, Jayne Lawlor and Nicole Martin, “Opinion: It’s Time to Reevaluate Standards for Women in the Military,” *Washington Post*, April 16, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/04/16/opinion-its-time-to-reevaluate-standards-for-women-in-the-military/>



women and timid, physically weak men. This connects back to the point I made earlier about fitness standards. Certainly, a higher fitness standard is required for combat service as opposed to general military service, but that should not mean that women are a priori disqualified. Not only is the barring of women discriminating, but by doing so the military potentially dismisses real talent without ever assessing it. Furthermore, studies also show that even if women are more prone to injuries, they are also more likely to seek medical attention and follow the advice given, whereas men have been proven to often conceal injuries. In one particular study it was concluded that when the numbers were adjusted to include unreported injuries, there was no statistically significant gender gap in injury rates.<sup>100</sup>

The traditionalist might insist that biology does not lie, and women are meant to do jobs that are less physically demanding because nature has structured their bodies a certain way. As such, he would insist a natural division of labor exists. However, the strength, size, and shape of a person's muscles are not only determined by nature, but also by other factors, such as how a person exercises, what a person eats, and by social conditioning. For example, men and women are expected to work out differently. It is socially acceptable for a man to lift heavy weights and get as ripped and big as he wishes, but when a woman does the same, she is again considered defective as a kind. Instead, women are encouraged to do aerobics, exercise classes, yoga, and other kinds of exercise that keep them slim and toned. Thus, these types of social conditionings of the body shape the ontology of the different social kinds. Bartky suggests that

The categories of masculinity and femininity do more than assist in the construction of personal identities; they are critical elements in our informal

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

social ontology. This may account to some degree for the otherwise puzzling phenomenon of homophobia and for the revulsion felt by many at the sight of female bodybuilders; neither the homosexual nor the muscular woman can be assimilated easily into the categories that structure everyday life.<sup>101</sup>

The female combat soldier is like the female bodybuilder in many ways since she takes on traditional masculine characteristics, both in physical appearance and in her mentality. The strong muscular woman becomes threatening to the social hierarchy because she does not conform to the generally accepted social norms for the category of ‘woman.’

Many men and women also eat differently, and thus have different physiques, since women are constantly told they should be skinny. Eating only salads is not going to build any muscle mass, no matter how much a person works out, so the social conditioning we apply to our bodies has a tremendous effect on the overall difference in fitness levels and strength between men and women. Dieting is another example of how women impose discipline upon their bodies.<sup>102</sup> In fact, dieting is so widespread amongst women in the Western world that eating disorders are a real and prevalent problem.

Women are literally killing themselves to conform to the unrealistic slenderness ideal of our time, and women live in constant fear of “fat-shaming.” On this problem Wolf writes,

(...) Female fat is the subject of public passion, and women feel guilty about female fat, because we implicitly recognize that under the [beauty] myth, women’s bodies are not our own, but society’s, and that thinness is not a private aesthetic, but hunger a social concession exacted by the community. A cultural fixation on female thinness is not an obsession about female beauty but an obsession about female obedience.<sup>103</sup>

Fear of calories keeps women from having strong healthy bodies and from realizing their full potentials. Perhaps more women would be interested in serving in jobs that are

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<sup>101</sup> Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, 77-78.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>103</sup> Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women*, 187.

physically demanding, such as jobs in the military, if they felt comfortable in their own skin.

Another example of the impact of social conditioning is childhood play and gender segregation. Boys are encouraged to adopt play styles and themes that are rough and physical. If they get especially rough, people will say, “oh, boys will be boys,” as if that explains why they were given play swords, G.I. Joe action figures, and plastic guns by their parents and relatives for Christmas. Meanwhile the little girls got Barbie dolls and pink dresses while they were told to be “good little girls.”

Not only do children adopt certain behaviors and corporal styles because of the encouragement from parents and teachers, but children have also been found to enforce gender norms amongst themselves. One particular study on children and gender categories suggests that

Children themselves also play an active role in perpetuating [an] ubiquitous role of gender. At around 30-36 months of age, children display a marked preference for same-sex peers (...) with these preferences increasing throughout childhood. By preschool age, 50% of children’s play involves only opposite sex peers (...) Such same-sex preferences occur independently of parental, or other adult, interactions (...).<sup>104</sup>

One might then be led to think that children have a natural tendency to associate with same-sex peers, but the study showed that children self-identify as members of a potential social category, rather than forming their self-identification from their own individuality. The study found that the experiences boys and girls have in their same-sex groups reinforce the social aspect of gender and that the experiences do not bring out innate

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<sup>104</sup> Barbara J. David, Diana M. Grace, and Michelle K. Ryan, “Investigating Preschoolers’ Categorical Thinking About Gender Through Imitation, Attention, and the Use of Self-Categories,” *Child Development* 79, no. 6 (2008): 1928.

differences or preferences within the group.<sup>105</sup> Thus, some features that are perceived as biologically determined, and therefore “natural,” are in fact socially constructed. Biology alone cannot explain why we are the way we are.

This brings me back to my previous point about gender revolving around the body. As Haslanger explains, a person’s sex is based on an anatomical/reproductive distinction, and gender marks the social/political positions that correspond to the respective sex.<sup>106</sup> It is extremely difficult for women to be defined in ways that do not stem from their anatomical/reproductive distinctions, and it is typically the key weapon used against women when they face discrimination. The traditionalist, in his attempt to define women, seems particularly fond of reducing women to their physical bodies, but are women really their bodies? Not according to de Beauvoir, who in a reference to Merleau-Ponty wrote, “ (...) man is not a natural species: he is a historical idea. Woman is not a fixed reality but a becoming; she has to be compared with man in her becoming, that is, her possibilities have to be defined (...).”<sup>107</sup> Thus, because women are generally found to have less muscular strength than men, their possibilities, in every aspect of society, have been defined according to this comparison. The comparison between men and women’s muscle mass has also led to the idea that women naturally need protection from men, and because women are weaker than men physically, they have been perceived “ (...) as victims dependent on men rather than as autonomous agents capable

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 1937.

<sup>106</sup> Haslanger, “Gender and Social Construction: Who? What? When? Where? How?” 20.

<sup>107</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (London: Vintage Books, 2011), 46.

of defending themselves.”<sup>108</sup> A woman’s body has generally been viewed as the embodiment of weakness, and because she has been perceived as weak, her role in society, through a natural division of labor, has been assigned to her accordingly. Being defined *only* in terms of her body has meant that a woman *is* her reproductive function, her hair, her breasts, her soft curves, and her lower muscle mass.

Often when a person is socially defined as being a certain way the person will start identifying with the label or category she has been perceived by others to fit in. This is what Ian Hacking calls a “looping effect.” He writes,

To create new ways of classifying people is also to change how we think of ourselves, to change our sense of self-worth, even how we remember our own past. This in turn generates a looping effect, because people of the kind behave differently, and so are different. That is to say the kind changes, and so there is new causal knowledge to be gained and perhaps, old causal knowledge to be jettisoned.<sup>109</sup>

For example, a woman who is perceived and classified as being ‘girly’ will internalize the social meaning of what it means to be ‘girly.’ Perhaps in a particular society, such as our own, ‘girly’ means wearing pretty dresses and getting one’s nails done every week. Based on that knowledge this woman will not see herself as someone who could join the Army and crawl through the mud, as the classification as ‘girly’ has become manifested in her identity. This is not to say that a person cannot change category, surely that is possible, but the looping (or feedback) effect serves to change a person’s self-conception and behavior. At times these invisible social constraints on identity can be hard to break

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<sup>108</sup> Lucinda Joy Peach, “Gender Ideology in the Ethics of Women in Combat,” in *It’s Our Military, Too! Women and the U.S. Military*, ed. Judith Hicks Stiehm (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 156.

<sup>109</sup> Ian Hacking, “The Looping Effects of Human Kinds,” in *Causal Cognition: A Multi-disciplinary Debate*, ed. Ann James Premack, David Premack, and Dan Sperber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 369.

free from.

While it is true that men are generally stronger than women, the appeal to biologically determined features about a particular sex could not explain why some women can perform hard physical labor and why some men cannot. Women are not exempt from being able to do physically demanding jobs, as exemplified by women working in construction, the uniformed services (military and police), bodybuilding, and the fitness industry.

It is arbitrary to point at women's bodily features and functions and use those as reasons for exclusion from combat positions. This seems especially unfair since we do not arbitrarily pick out features perceived to be particular to men and use them to determine what men can and cannot do. If it was perceived to be true that men are physically stronger and more aggressive than women, we could then decide that men should not work in certain occupations based on that fact. For example, in nursing or childcare men's biologically determined features or abilities would be a hindrance to performing those jobs well, as one needs to be gentle and kind, not aggressive and forceful, in those particular occupations. Excluding men from nursing and childcare because of their biologically determined features sounds absurd, and so does barring woman from combat because of an incorrect view of what it means to be a woman.

What is then needed is a clarification of

(...) The biological data by examining them in the light of ontological, economic, social, and psychological context (...) [A woman's] body is not enough to define her; it has a lived reality only as taken on by consciousness through actions and within society; biology alone cannot provide an answer to the question that concerns us: why is woman the *Other*? The question is how, in her, nature has been taken on in the course of history; the question is what humanity has made of

the human female.<sup>110</sup>

Women are not only their bodies, and fair standards and assessment of abilities (section 4.3) should determine whether or not a woman is eligible to serve in a combat position.

## 5.2 Objection #2: Women Disrupt Male Bonding and Unit Cohesion

Mitchell suggests that some disadvantages about women in the military can be hard to observe, but “they include the deleterious effects of the presence of women on unit cohesion, the fighting spirit, and loyalty and respect that servicemen feel toward their service.”<sup>111</sup> In a reference to the first attempts at sex-integration at the Air Force Academy, Mitchell writes that rather than bonding over a masculine warrior image, which he considers to be of major social value, men found that the “new social value of an androgynous warrior” was forced upon them.<sup>112</sup> In other words, when the military let women into certain positions in the military it allowed for changes to the nature of the military, which had otherwise been considered strictly a man’s world. In a man’s world men do ‘male things’ that strengthen overall unit cohesion by building unbreakable bonds between men. Notice again that the woman, because of the differences in her body, her ‘otherness’ from man, is perceived to be so different, so alien, that she is deemed incapable of fathoming what men bond over. Instead she comes along and forces androgyny on the men, because it would be equally unfathomable that the men should try to understand what a woman would care to bond over.

What exactly is male bonding, though? The concept almost has a mysterious aura

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<sup>110</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 49.

<sup>111</sup> Mitchell, *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster*, 349.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

around it, and it is supposed to be incomprehensible, not only to outsiders of a unit or group, but also particularly to women. Male bonding is “thought to build soldiers’ confidence and thereby increase combat readiness and effectiveness.”<sup>113</sup> The traditionalist’s worry is that mixing women into the ranks will disrupt the brotherhood and camaraderie that men depend on to complete the mission. Furthermore, an alternative definition of male bonding suggests that,

Male bonding is related to the accountability ethic in that unit cohesion is understood to be a function of interpersonal relations between military leaders and their troops and the leader’s ability to create and sustain those interpersonal skills that allow him to build strong ties with his men.<sup>114</sup>

While bonding in a unit is undoubtedly something that strengthens unit cohesion, it is questionable why the bonding has to be ‘male.’ Instead of being a positive tool for team building, this mysterious ritual of male bonding serves as a method for discrimination and exclusion, as it automatically disqualifies women from being participants.

Male bonding is yet another product of social fiction that only serves to reinforce imaginary lines of division between the sexes. The myth of male bonding will have us believe that women cannot possibly understand what men talk about and bond over, but what exactly is it that men talk about that women cannot understand? Surely, it cannot be topics related to, for example, sex, pornography, and women, stereotypically topics that men are interested in, because those topics have nothing to do with the mission at hand. For example, if the mission is to raid houses and look for weapons caches, it makes no sense that men should first bond over any of those topics for the mission to go well.

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<sup>113</sup> MacKenzie, Megan H., “Let Women Fight: Ending the U.S. Military’s Female Combat Ban.”

<sup>114</sup> Peach, “Gender Ideology in the Ethics of Women in Combat,” in *It’s Our Military, Too! Women and the U.S. Military*,” 166.



Rather, there should be a sense of professional bonding over the task at hand.

In a review of the literature on cohesion (1993) it was concluded that there is a difference between “social cohesion” and “task cohesion,”

Social cohesion: the network of buddy relationships within a group whose members enjoy spending time with one another.

Task cohesion: a group’s shared sense of a common goal.<sup>115</sup>

Similarly, a 1995 study done by the U.S. Army Research Institute for Behavioral and Social Sciences concluded that,

The relation between cohesiveness and performance is due primarily to the ‘commitment to the task’ component, and not the ‘interpersonal attraction’ or ‘group pride’ component of cohesiveness.<sup>116</sup>

With these definitions in mind, it is not unreasonable to suggest that task cohesion, or professional bonding, should take precedence over social cohesion. In many other professions men and women work together in critical scenarios, in roles such as nuclear scientists, forensic crime scene technicians, surgeons, EMTs, and police officers, and it would be absurd to suggest that these people cannot perform their professional duties, the jobs they have been trained to do, because social cohesion or male bonding has not been established. Granted, sometimes we work with people we might dislike for various reasons, but as trained professionals the mission or task should always come first. Putting the mission first means putting aside any conflicting personal feelings that might hinder the mission’s success. If the traditionalist is truly concerned with the mission, or national security, for that matter, he should have no problem accepting that professional bonding

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<sup>115</sup> Carol Burke, “Pernicious Cohesion,” in *It’s Our Military, Too! Women and the U.S. Military*, ed. Judith Hicks Stiehm (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 216.

<sup>116</sup> MacKenzie, Megan H., “Let Women Fight: Ending the U.S. Military’s Female Combat Ban.”

is preferred to male bonding. Not only does male bonding alienate women, but it also alienates the men, who are uncomfortable with the traditional notions of male bonding, such as talking about sex or enduring humiliation during training, or more generally, anything that is perceived as hypermasculine.

Mitchell believes that male bonding is something sacred in the military, and by letting women serve with men that sacred ritual gets tainted. He writes,

The presence of women inhibits male bonding, corrupts allegiance to the hierarchy, and diminishes the desire of men to compete for anything but the attentions of women. Pushing women into the military academies made a mockery of the academies' *essential* nature and most honored values.<sup>117</sup>  
[Emphasis added.]

Mitchell, once again, assumes that gender categories are constituted by essential properties. He believes that men, from nature's side, are unable to concentrate when women are around, and he believes that the military has an 'essential nature' that women corrode.

Mitchell's comments on male bonding are problematic for two reasons. First, since humans create institutions, such as the military academies, it makes no sense to speak of the institutions as having an essential nature. Mitchell must mean that the essence of the military is based on what he perceives to be an essence of man, but since women have been performing admirably in the military for years now this claim falls short. If institutions are human creations, then their essences will also have to be human creations, which makes it irrelevant to speak of an "essential nature" of the military.

Second, Mitchell does not consider the fact that the structure of institutions can change for various reasons, for example, to improve and become more efficient. Men,

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<sup>117</sup> Mitchell, *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster*, 175.

who have never worked professionally with women, can certainly learn to do so, even if it will be a steep learning curve, and the military as an organization can be restructured to incorporate women without putting the mission at risk. Women can partake in honored values just as well as men, and to believe otherwise is to accept myths of gender.

### 5.3 Objection #3: Women Are Sexual Distractions

Fraternization, defined as prohibited relationships between persons of different rank and positions, has long been frowned upon in the military, as it can potentially lead to situations where order, discipline, and unit cohesion will be put at risk. Particularly, casual and romantic relationships are prohibited between officers and enlisted personnel and between personnel with a high difference in rank.

On the topic of fraternization Mitchell writes, “ (...) nothing has done more to cheapen rank and diminish respect for authority than cute little female lieutenants and privates. Military customs and regulations are no match for the forces that draw men and women together in pairs (...).”<sup>118</sup> According to Mitchell, a major problem with women in the military is the impact of their presence on the behavior of men.<sup>119</sup> On Mitchell’s interpretation women are the causes of fraternization, and because women’s presence causes an unwanted sexual distraction, it is the *women*, not the men, who threaten military readiness and effectiveness. Thus, Mitchell is convinced women should not be in men’s units.

Again, Mitchell appeals to biology to get his point across. Men are testosterone-driven creatures, unable to perform their jobs well when women are around, simply

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 173.

because they are hardwired that way. On the other hand, women are sexual objects, who, by their sheer presence, distract men into thinking about sex. The “cute little female lieutenants and privates” that Mitchell mentions are also biologically fixed, and the traditionalist’s objection is based on a belief that biology will take its course and overrule even military customs and regulations.

Mitchell’s objection is an example of how to blame women for being sexual objects, and he reduces the female soldiers, who should be considered peers, to nothing but sexed bodies. However, it is not nature that has made women into sexual objects. The objectification of women has long been a product of the sexual division of labor, and by constructing a role for women based on her body, it has been possible to keep her out of historically male domains, such as the military and politics, by insisting that women are simply not made for that kind of business. The idea of women as sexed bodies is in line with the disciplinary practices that control women through social norms. Not only are the disciplines focused on the restriction of a woman’s gesture, posture, and movement, but they also aim to mold the female body into a sexual object.<sup>120</sup>

Even if a woman does not desire to be seen as a sexual object, she cannot escape the way she is looked at by others. Despite her resistance to conform to society’s norms of what is sexy, she is still judged by that norm. For example, a woman might decide not to wear tight skinny jeans or low cut shirts to escape the hyper femininity often forced upon women by the advertising industry, but by *not* wearing skinny jeans or low cut shirts, and instead opting for baggy clothing, she is still vulnerable to critique. Critics will point out that she looks dull, drab, and not very feminine, so despite trying to avoid being

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<sup>120</sup> Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, 67.

a sexed body, she is still compared to one against society's norms.

Women in the military already face this kind of critique, and they often get accused of wanting to be men. While it is within military regulations for a woman to wear a little makeup discreetly, it is nearly impossible for a woman in uniform to meet society's standards for femininity. This becomes even more apparent when a female soldier is put in a deployment/combat environment. A female combat soldier would not be able to maintain an extensive beauty routine everyday, and even if she did not care about cosmetics and expensive lotions, she would still be scrutinized for not looking a certain way. On this matter Skaine writes, "A relationship exists between societal sexual behaviors toward women, a woman's occupational position in society, and a man's background and beliefs system. It is no different in the military."<sup>121</sup> Skaine recommends that we continue to improve societal sexual behavior as men get used to working with women and learn to see them as peers, and she stresses the point that "the negative sexual behavior is in most cases a societally constructed role."<sup>122</sup>

The transfer of society's way of viewing a woman as a sexed body into the military prevents a woman from being viewed as a soldier and an equal. Instead, the woman, in her role as a sexual object, is viewed as a dangerous creature. Despite wearing a uniform the woman is still a sexual temptation that not even camouflage can disguise. She is a temptress and a whore, who, by being in close proximity to men in the military, will serve as a sexual distraction and destroy men's will to fight.<sup>123</sup> This stands in contrast

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<sup>121</sup> Skaine, *Women at War: Gender Issues of Americans in Combat*, 190.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>123</sup> Lucy V. Katz, "Free a Man to Fight: The Exclusion of Women From Combat Positions in the Armed Forces," *Law & Inequality: A Journal of Theory and Practice* 10, no. 1 (1991): 2.

to woman's other role, also defined by her body, as mother and caretaker. As Lucy V. Katz puts it, "(...) the image tells us women need protection by and from men, but women are also dangerous and men need protection from them."<sup>124</sup>

Mitchell gives the following reasons for why women (allegedly) are the cause of fraternization,

The services have not yet noticed the effect of *charm* on the daily relations of men and women. Men like women, and because they like women, they cannot treat women as they treat other men. They are rarely as firm, as harsh, or as critical with women as with other men (...) Even if charm does not lead to fraternization, it does affect a woman's treatment and prestige. (...) [Too many senior officers believe] that the way men have always been is not the way they are now or will be soon. These men pretend that sex can easily be ignored. They insist that professionalism means putting aside one's manhood as a relic of prehistory and that the difficulties caused by having women in the military are merely management problems.<sup>125</sup>

Mitchell calls out women's charm as the problem, and that scenario is reminiscent of Odysseus' voyage home, when he must pass the island from which the alluring music and voices of the Sirens can be heard. The Sirens, beautiful but dangerous creatures, try to lure bypassing sailors with their mesmerizing sounds. Only from having the foresight to plug his men's ears with beeswax and demand that he himself gets tied to the mast of the ship, does Odysseus manage to save his own and his sailors' lives from the Sirens. So powerful was the calling of the sirens that it could make the bravest man, who heard their songs, drown.

Mitchell wants us to believe that the seductive song of the Sirens is equal to the sexual, hypnotic effect of a woman's body. Whereas Odysseus and his sailors found it necessary to plug their ears with beeswax to withstand the seductiveness of the Sirens,

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 2

<sup>125</sup> Mitchell, *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster*, 176.

Mitchell likewise believes it is necessary to exclude women from combat positions because their embodiment as temptresses and seducers is distracting to men. Thus, Mitchell believes it is the women who create the problem of fraternization, and therefore it is the women who should accept that they do not belong in combat positions.

However, once again Mitchell subscribes to social fictions about women. It is because 'woman' has been socially constructed as a sexed body that she is perceived as such. Even if sexual attraction is something 'natural' and necessary for human kind as a species to continue, there is nothing natural about the level of objectification that women are subjected to, both in and out of the military. Also, it would be false to assume that most women actually like to be perceived as sexual objects. A woman willing to endure the hardships of being a professional soldier does not sign up because she thinks the military is a great place to meet men. She signs up for all the same reasons men do, such as patriotism and a desire to test mental and physical boundaries. A woman who has demonstrated the ability to serve in combat positions and who performs tasks to standard deserves to be respectfully treated like a soldier, and not as a dangerous Siren.

Mitchell might still argue that it is nature that has created woman as a sexed body as a necessary part of her reproductive function. After all, as a sexed body a woman can attract a man, have his children, and thereby secure the protection that a woman allegedly needs from a man. If that was to be true, then it should be a cause for concern when considering letting women into combat positions for two reasons: first, women can get pregnant, and pregnancy becomes the problem of the whole unit; and second, because of nature's ordering of a woman's body, she is at risk for rape and sexual assault. I will consider each issue in turn.

### 5.3.1 Pregnancy

Pregnancy is a real concern for the military. It can disrupt the ability of a military unit to “mobilize troops rapidly for combat, since it cannot be predicted in advance which women will be pregnant and thus unavailable for deployment.”<sup>126</sup> The military does not have policies in place that allow for the replacement of a pregnant servicewoman, and coworkers could therefore potentially be left with a heavier workload because of a pregnancy in the unit.<sup>127</sup> Mitchell is concerned that pregnancy is the main cause for women’s attrition rate, which he believes to be higher than men’s, as “attrition reduces service strength, increases personnel turbulence, and robs the service of its training investment.”<sup>128</sup> Ultimately, Mitchell believes that women will use pregnancy as a way out if they do not want to be in the military anymore.

While I do not doubt that some women have gotten pregnant to get out of their obligation to the military, it hardly seems fair to suggest that most women are willing to use pregnancy as a way out. Additionally, no studies or statistics are available to back up Mitchell’s claim. Many women who get pregnant while in the military will simply choose to have their children and afterwards carry on with their commitment to the service. Research has shown that it is false that pregnant servicewomen lose more duty time than men, since men have been recorded as having more time lost for being AWOL (absent without leave), and for desertion, drug/alcohol abuse, and jail time.<sup>129</sup>

I propose a preventative approach to the problem of deployment readiness and

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<sup>126</sup> Peach, “Gender Ideology in the Ethics of Women in Combat,” in *It’s Our Military, Too! Women and the U.S. Military*,” 171.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>128</sup> Mitchell, *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster*, 151.

<sup>129</sup> Peach, “Gender Ideology in the Ethics of Women in Combat,” in *It’s Our Military, Too! Women and the U.S. Military*,” 170.



pregnancy, and I have the following three considerations in mind. First, even though it sounds elementary, some sort of sexual education should be mandatory across the military. It could be incorporated into the briefings on sexual harassment and sexual assault (see 5.3.2), and it should serve as a forum in which service members learn the real costs (it can cost the military up to \$10,000 to send a pregnant service member home from a deployment<sup>130</sup>) and issues that arise from women getting pregnant prior to or during a deployment.

Second, every service member should know about contraceptive care and have access to it. In 2012 the Navy instated a new policy, which required all female sailors to be offered contraception services before deployment.<sup>131</sup> This policy should be instituted across the services, and it should also be extended to men. A taboo across the military is the issue of having sex while on deployment, and since it obviously happens, even if it is frowned upon, both men and women should take preventive measures to avoid unwanted pregnancies. Once deployed there are not many options for contraceptive care, and many service members are uncomfortable talking to medical personnel about it.

Also, even though service members have access to free contraception, female service members do not have access to free abortion. Due to federal abortion laws female service members cannot get abortion services on military installations (except in cases of rape or incest), and it would be far too dangerous to go off base in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan to find local services.<sup>132</sup> Being informed about contraception and having

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<sup>130</sup> Jacque Wilson, “Unplanned Pregnancies May Be on the Rise in Military,” *CNN*, January 24, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/01/23/health/unplanned-pregnancies-military/>

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

access to it would bring the numbers of unwanted pregnancies down.

Third, it would make sense to conduct pregnancy tests during deployments. Obviously this would not serve to prevent pregnancy, but it would serve to remove the pregnant woman from a dangerous environment as soon as possible. From her experiences with commanding mixed-sexed units, Colonel Katherine M. Cook advocates for “100 % pregnancy testing during deployment,” particularly three to four weeks after arrival in theatre, since “conducting pregnancy testing prior to deployment will only help marginally.”<sup>133</sup> It is in theatre that pregnancy really becomes a problem because the pregnant soldier must be sent home, and suddenly the unit is short on personnel. Conducting pregnancy tests in theatre is not a policy implemented throughout the services, but it should be to accommodate women and save lives from being lost. For example, during a deployment to Kuwait, two soldiers in Colonel Cook’s unit did not know they were pregnant. One of them experienced an ectopic pregnancy, and the other went through a spontaneous miscarriage.<sup>134</sup> Colonel Cook finds the issue of mandatory pregnancy testing in theatre to be a health and welfare issue and not a gender issue.<sup>135</sup>

Pregnancy can potentially disturb a unit’s readiness, but with the right preventative measures it would be possible to bring the number of unwanted pregnancies across the military down. It is not only the women service members who need to be informed about contraception, but also the men who serve alongside them. It seems one-

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<sup>133</sup> Kathleen M. Cook, “Leading Soldiers on Today’s Battlefield: Considerations on Contributions and Challenges of the Integration and Role of Soldiers Who Are Women,” in “Women in Combat Compendium,” ed. Michele M. Putko and Douglas V. Johnson II, *Strategic Studies Institute* (2008): 56.

<http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/pub830.pdf>

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 59.

sided to only blame the female service member who becomes pregnant downrange, when the male service member she was having sex with is culpable as well. Instead the military should initiate honest and open dialogues about sex and deployment. By making sex, pregnancy, and contraception taboos, the military is not helping the problem; it is perpetuating it.

### 5.3.2 Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

The second issue that arose from Mitchell's perception of nature's ordering of the woman's body as a sexed body was that she is at risk for sexual assault and sexual harassment, not only within the U.S. Armed Forces, but also as a POW.<sup>136</sup> Sexual assault and sexual harassment are real issues in the military. In fiscal year 2014 the DoD received 6,131 reports of sexual assault from service members and civilians working with the military. Since many victims do not report the crimes perpetrated against them, it is estimated that the actual number of sexual assault victims is 20,300. Of that number 10,600 are estimated to be men and 9,600 to be women. Because men outnumber women 6:1 in the military, women are still far more likely to become victims of sexual assault than men. However, there is also an extensive problem with men getting assaulted, but men are generally less likely to report sexual crimes and instead write them off as hazing

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<sup>136</sup> The news of the sexual assault on Private First Class Jessica Lynch while she was a POW in Iraq in early 2003 horrified the American public and stirred the debate over whether or not women should be allowed in combat. However, PFC Lynch was a unit supply specialist, who got taken POW when the convoy she was on got ambushed, so technically she was not "in direct combat" as per the definition in the combat exclusion policy. Her case shows how difficult it has been to define what "forward on the battlefield" has meant in the kind of modern warfare fought in the Middle East.

or bullying.<sup>137</sup>

Military leaders have tried to overcome the problem of sexual assault with extensive training and by raising awareness of the issue. For example, in the Army the Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) program has been instated to proactively reduce the number of incidents of sexual assault or harassment in the Army. The SHARP mission statement announces that “the SHARP Program’s mission is to reduce with an aim toward eliminating sexual offences within the Army through cultural change, prevention, intervention, investigation, accountability, advocacy/response, assessment, and training to sustain the All-Volunteer Force.”<sup>138</sup>

In 2012 a documentary called “The Invisible War” came out about the epidemic of rape and sexual assault in the U.S. military. Army units across the nation were made to watch the documentary as part of the mandatory SHARP training. By having open, honest conversations about the problem the leadership hoped to shine a light on the issue as a preventive measure. As part of the Army’s SHARP policy a Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC) was also designated in all units. Victims of sexual harassment or assault were given the opportunity to confidentially disclose the incident(s) to the SARC without fear of retaliation. The Army’s policy shows that the services are aware of the problem, but also that the problem is far from being solved. A particularly worrisome observation is the number of offences that go unreported every year.

Several high-profile sexual assault cases from the military are well known. For example, in the Aberdeen Scandal (1996) 12 male soldiers were charged with sexual

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<sup>137</sup> Richard Sisk, “Military Sexual Assault Reports Increased 11 Percent Last Year,” *Military.com*, May 1, 2015, <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2015/05/01/military-sexual-assault-reports-increased-11-percent-last-year.html>

<sup>138</sup> U.S. Army, SHARP, January 4, 2016, <http://www.sexualassault.army.mil/index.cfm>

assault on women trainees at an U.S. Army base in Maryland, and in the Tailhook scandal (1991) more than 100 Navy and Marine Corps officers allegedly sexually assaulted 83 women and seven men at the Las Vegas Hilton in Las Vegas, Nevada. In response to various well-known sex scandals that have happened across the military, Mitchell writes, “They [the leadership trying to integrate women] just didn’t understand how things work in the real world, how powerful sex is, how craven some men are, and how spiteful and manipulative some women can be.”<sup>139</sup>

What Mitchell is saying is that if women had not been in the military, they would not have been sexually assaulted. Several issues arise from this kind of reasoning, such as the tactless blaming of the victim and the blatant disregard for the fact that men are also sexually assaulted in the military. As with any professional workplace a person should be able to show up to do his or her job without fear of sexual assault. No explanation of biology and nature’s way can override the fact that nothing gives anyone the right to impose himself (or herself) sexually on another human being. It is also highly insulting to most men, who do respect the boundaries of women and other men, to suggest that men are so “craven” that they cannot control themselves and their sexual urges. Sexual offences are a major problem within the Armed Forces, but the solution is not to blame victims or to excuse men from taking responsibility for acting in a professional manner in the workplace.

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<sup>139</sup> Mitchell, *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster*, 331.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The purpose of my thesis was to show why Secretary Carter's decision to open all combat-related jobs to women was the right decision. The combat exclusion has long served as an obstacle for women, who wanted to become career soldiers, sailors, or marines, as it minimized chances of promotions and recognition as well as denied women equal access to jobs of their choice in the military based on qualifications and abilities. The end of the combat exclusion shatters, in theory, the "armored ceiling" that has long separated female service members from their male peers, and it counts as another milestone for women's equality in a domain that historically has been male.

Although the view I have offered about women in combat is a positive one, I am also aware that I have to keep my optimism within a realistic framework. The military will not magically be integrated tomorrow or the day after. It will be a slow uphill climb for women to be recognized as equals in combat-related positions since the traditional views about gender roles and capabilities that are deeply entrenched throughout society are not going to change overnight. To the traditionalist it is shocking to suggest that women can do what men can do. It turns his whole world upside down, as it threatens the social hierarchy held in place by the patriarchy's disciplinary practices. If it was true that women could not serve in combat because they really are "supposed" to carry their bodies in a certain manner and adorn their bodies differently than men, then it would make sense that they had no place in combat. However, there is no such mandate by

nature that women are supposed to be this kind of way or fit a very narrow definition of what it means to be a 'woman.' Many of the ideas that the traditionalist has about women amount to myths and works of social fiction. By breaking down these false assumptions about sex and gender it turns out that the traditionalist does not have a strong case against women in combat positions after all.

Philosophers and feminists should take the view of the traditionalist seriously. He represents a stubborn minority that holds deep-rooted beliefs about gender roles, not only in the military, but also throughout society in general. It would be foolish to assume that the way gender roles are looked at throughout society does not carry over into the military. Men in the military, who are against integrating and working with women, are this way because that is the model they have seen throughout civilian society. Through social gender norms we constantly reinforce that women cannot do what men can do, and somewhere along the lines we have come to accept these social fictions about women. This, at the very least, should be enough reason for philosophers and feminists to take the view of the traditionalist seriously.

Paradigm shifts have happened in the U.S. military before without compromising the strength of the organization. For example, the mini ball and faster loading rifles changed the tactics of war during the Civil War. In World War I the introduction of barbed wire and machine guns completely altered how war was conducted.<sup>140</sup> Likewise, when African Americans were integrated into the ranks in 1948 it created a paradigm shift, but only for the better. It expanded the pool of recruits and overall helped make the

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<sup>140</sup> Shaun Snow, "Military Move Toward Women in Combat Signals a Major Paradigm Shift," *Navy Times*, February 7, 2016, <http://www.navytimes.com/story/opinion/2016/02/07/women-in-combat-paradigm-shift-how-wars-fought/79873548/>

U.S. military the strong and successful organization that it is today. Certainly, opening all combat-related jobs to women will also generate a fundamental shift in the structure of the military, but it will be a shift that finally brings formal policies in line with current practices.<sup>141</sup> The new policy announced by the DoD is the right policy for an integrated military that is both progressive and effective. The days of the good old boys club are over; women are willing and capable of serving on the front lines, and it is about time that we let them.

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<sup>141</sup> Megan H. MacKenzie, *Let Women Fight*.



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